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IT WAS THE LAST SHOT. AS HE FIRED IT LARRY LEAPED TO ONE
SIDE TO ESCAPE THE LION'S CLAWS.

Larry Dexter, Reporter

LARRY DEXTER, REPORTER

OR

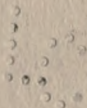
STRANGE ADVENTURES IN A
GREAT CITY

BY

HOWARD R. GARIS

AUTHOR OF "FROM OFFICE BOY TO REPORTER," "THE ISLE OF
BLACK FIRE," "THE WHITE CRYSTALS," ETC., ETC.

ILLUSTRATED



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THE GREAT NEWSPAPER
SERIES

By HOWARD R. GARIS

FROM OFFICE BOY TO REPORTER

Or, The First Step in Journalism

LARRY DEXTER, REPORTER

Or, Strange Adventures in a Great City

(Other volumes in preparation)

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Larry Dexter, Reporter

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INTRODUCTION

MY DEAR BOYS.—Those of you who were interested in the first story of this series, telling how Larry Dexter rose from a copy boy to become a reporter, may desire to follow his further adventures as a newspaper worker. Many of the occurrences told of in this volume are actual ones. In some I participated personally. In others newspaper friends of mine were concerned, though I have made some slight changes from what actually happened.

The tracing of the blue-handed man, who blew open the safe by means of nitro-glycerine, is an actual fact, having taken place in the city where I live. He was arrested afterwards because a detective observed the stains left by the acid on his fingers. The riot in Chinatown is similar to several that have occurred there, and kidnappings, such as befell Jimmy, are common enough in New York. There are few reporters, especially on the large papers, who have not gone

through as thrilling incidents as those which happened to Larry, for, as I can vouch from many years' experience, a newspaper man's life is anything but a quiet and uneventful one.

Yours sincerely,

HOWARD R. GARIS.

July 1, 1907.

LARRY DEXTER, REPORTER

CHAPTER I

A REPORTER'S MISTAKE

"COPY!"

The city editor's voice rang out sharply, and he held in his extended hand a bunch of paper, without lifting his eyes from the story he was going over with a correcting pencil. There was no answer save the clicking of half a score of typewriters, at which sat busy reporters.

"Copy!" cried the editor once more. There was a shuffle among a trio of boys on the far side of the room.

"Copy! copy!" fairly shouted the exasperated editor, as he shook the papers, looking up from his work towards the boys who were now advancing together on a run. "What's the matter with all of you? Getting deaf, or are you tired of work? When you hear 'Copy' called at this time of day you want to jump! Now all the way up to the composing room with that, Bud. It's got to make the first edition!"

"Yes, sir!" exclaimed Bud Nelson, head copy

boy on the New York *Daily Leader*, one of the largest afternoon papers of the metropolis, as he raced upstairs to where the clicking type-setting machines were in noisy operation.

"You boys must be more lively," went on Mr. Bruce Emborg, the city editor. "This is not a playroom nor a kindergarten. You must learn to jump up whenever you hear the assistant city editor or myself call 'Copy.' I make some allowances for you boys who have not been here long, but it must not occur again."

The two remaining lads went back to their bench looking a little startled, for, though Mr. Emborg was a kind man, he could be severe when there was occasion for it.

"Did he give you a laying-out?" asked Bud, of his companions, when he returned.

"I just guess yes," replied Charles Anderson, the tallest of the copy boys. "You ought to have heard him!"

"I was so busy telling you fellows about the party last night I didn't hear him call," said Bud. "We'll have to be more careful, or we'll lose our jobs."

"Copy!" called the editor again, and this time the three reached the desk almost at the same instant.

"That's the way to do it," remarked Mr. Emborg. "That's what I like to see."

For the next few minutes there was a busy scene in the city room of the *Leader*. Reporters

were writing like mad on their typewriters, and rushing with the loose sheets of paper over to the desk of the city editor or his assistant. These, and two copy readers, rapidly scanned the stories, made whatever corrections were necessary, put headings, or "heads," as they are called, on them, and gave them to the copy boys.

The lads ran out to the pneumatic tube that shot the copy to the composing room, or, in case of an important story, took it upstairs themselves so that it would receive immediate attention from the foreman.

The boys were running to and fro, as if in training for a race, typewriters were clicking as fast as though the operators were in a speed contest, the editors were slashing whole pages from stories to make them shorter, and the copy readers were doing likewise.

"Hurry up that stuff, Jones!" exclaimed the editor to one reporter. "You've only got two minutes!"

"Here it is!" cried Jones, yanking the last page from his typewriter.

For two minutes there was a wilder scene of activity than ever. Then came a comparatively quiet spell.

"That's all we can make for the first," remarked the editor, with something like a breath of relief. "We did pretty well."

The editor looked over a book that lay open in front of him on his desk. The cover was

marked "Assignments," and it was the volume in which memoranda of all the items that were to be gotten that day appeared. The editor glanced down the page.

"Here, Larry!" he called to a tall, good-looking youth, who was seated at a small desk. "Get this obituary, will you? It's about a man over on the West Side. He was ninety-eight years old, and belonged to a well-known New York family."

"Shall I get his picture?" asked Larry Dexter, as he came forward to go out on the assignment.

"No, we haven't time to make it to-day. Just get a brief sketch of his life. Hurry back."

Larry got his hat from the coat room, and left the office. He was the newest reporter on the *Leader*. The other reporters spoke of him as the "cub," not meaning anything disrespectful, but only to indicate that he was the "freshman," the apprentice, or whatever one considers the beginner in any line of work. Larry was a sort of fledgling at the business, though he had been on the *Leader* a number of months.

He began as a copy boy, just like one of the lads whom Mr. Emberg had cautioned about being in a hurry. Larry, with his mother, his sisters, Lucy, aged thirteen, and Mary, aged five, and his brother, James, lived in a fairly good tenement in New York City. They had come there from the village of Campton, New York, where Larry's father, who had been dead a few

years, once owned a fine farm. But reverses had overtaken the family, and some time after Mr. Dexter's death the place was sold at auction.

When the place had been disposed of, Mrs. Dexter desired to come to New York to live with her sister, Mrs. Edward Ralston. But, as related in the first volume of this series, entitled, "From Office Boy to Reporter; or, The First Step in Journalism," when Mrs. Dexter, with Larry and the other children, reached the big city, they found that Mrs. Ralston's husband had been killed a few days before in an accident. Mrs. Ralston, writing a hasty letter to her sister, had gone to live with other relatives in a distant state.

But Mrs. Dexter did not receive this letter on time, in consequence of having hastily undertaken the journey from Campton, and so did not hear of her sister's loss until she reached the house where Mrs. Ralston had lived. The travelers made the best of it, however, and were cared for by kind neighbors.

Larry soon secured work as an office, or copy, boy on the *Leader*, through one day being able to help Harvey Newton, one of the best reporters on the paper, at an exciting fire.

In those days Larry had trouble with Peter Manton, a rival copy boy, and he was kidnapped by some electric cab strikers who thought he was a reporter they wanted to pay off an old score on. The lad and Mr. Newton were sent to report a big flood in another part of the state, where the

big dam broke, and where many persons were in danger of being drowned.

While in the flooded district Larry met his old enemy, Peter, and there was a race between them to see who would get some copy, telling of the flood, to the telegraph office first. Larry won, and for this good work was promoted from an office boy to be a regular reporter. In the course of his duties as a copy boy he once saved a valuable watch from being stolen by pickpockets from a celebrated doctor, and the physician, in his gratitude, operated on Larry's sister Lucy, who suffered from a bad spinal disease, and cured her.

This made the family feel much happier, as now Lucy could go about like other girls, and did not have to spend many hours in a big chair. Larry's advancement also brought him a larger salary, so there was no further need for Mrs. Dexter to take in sewing. They were able also to move to a better apartment, though not far from where they had first settled.

Larry was able to put a little money in the bank, to add to the nest-egg of one thousand dollars which he received as a reward for finding the Reynolds jewels, though the thieves were not apprehended.

Larry had been acting in his new position as reporter about eight months when, on the morning that our story opens, he was sent to get the obituary of the aged man. In this time he had learned much that he never knew before, and

which would not have come to him in his capacity as copy boy. He had, as yet, been given only easy work, for though he had shown "a nose for news," as it is called, which means an ability to know a story when it comes one's way, Mr. Emborg felt the "cub" had better go a bit slow.

The young reporter managed to get what information he wanted without much trouble. He came back to the office, and wrote it up by hand, for he had not learned yet to use a typewriter. While he was engaged on the "obit," as death accounts are called for brevity, he had his eyes opened to something which stood him in good stead the rest of his life.

The first editions of other New York afternoon papers, all rivals of the *Leader*, had come into the *Leader* office. Mr. Emborg was glancing over them to see if his sheet had been beaten on any stories; that is, whether any of the other journals had stories which the *Leader* did not have, or better ones than those on similar subjects that appeared in the *Leader*.

"Hello! What's this?" the city editor exclaimed, suddenly. "Here's a big story of a fight at that Eleventh Ward political meeting, in the *Scorcher*. Who covered that meeting for us?"

"I did," replied a tall, thin youth.

"Did you have anything good in your story?" the editor asked.

"No—no, sir," stammered the youth, as he saw the angry look on the editor's face.

"Why not?"

"Because there wasn't any meeting," replied the luckless scribe. "It broke up in a free fight!"

"It what?" fairly roared the city editor.

"It broke up in a fight. The candidates tried to speak, but the crowd wouldn't let 'em. They called 'em names, and then they made a rush, and upset the stand, and there was a free fight. I couldn't hear any of the speeches, so I came away."

"You what?" asked the editor, trying to speak calmly. The room seemed strangely quiet.

"I came away. I thought you sent me to report the political meeting, but there wasn't any. It broke up in a fight," repeated the reporter.

"I thought you said you were a newspaper man," the city editor remarked. "I wouldn't have hired you if I knew you had had no experience."

"I did have some. I—I," began the unfortunate one.

"It must have been as society scribbler on the *Punktown Monthly Pink Tea Gazette*," exclaimed Mr. Emberg. "Why, you don't know enough about the business to report a Sunday school picnic."

"If you were sent to a house to get an account of a wedding," went on Mr. Emberg, "and while there the house should burn down, and all the people be killed, I suppose you would come

back and say there wasn't any wedding, it was a fire! Would you?"

"No—no, sir."

"Well, I guess you would! I don't believe you're cut out for the newspaper business. The idea of not reporting a meeting because it broke up in a fight! It's enough to make—but never mind! You can go to the cashier and get what money is coming to you. We can't afford to have mistakes like that occur. This is the best story in many a day. Why, they must have had a regular riot up there, according to the *Scorcher*. Here, Smith," the city editor went on, turning to an older reporter, "see what there is in this, and fix up a story," and Mr. Emberg handed over the article he had clipped from the rival paper. It was a bad beat on the *Leader*.

"I hope I never make a mistake like that," thought Larry, as he turned in his article. "My, that was a call-down!"

CHAPTER II

AMATEUR NIGHT

THE unfortunate reporter who had made the mistake, and who had been discharged in consequence, left the room. He had gained his position under somewhat false pretenses, and so there was little sympathy felt for him.

"We don't want careless work on the *Leader*," went on Mr. Emborg, speaking to no one in particular. "We want the news, and those who have no noses for it had better look alive. We're in the news business, and that's what we have to give the people."

The reporter, to whom Mr. Emborg had given the clipping, soon ascertained that, in the main, it was correct. So a story was made up concerning the Eleventh Ward meeting, and run in the second edition of the *Leader*, much to the disgust of the city editor, who hated to be "beaten."

The rebuke the unfortunate reporter received produced a feeling of uneasiness among the others on the staff of the *Leader*, and there were many whispered conferences among the men that afternoon. However the "ax" did not fall again, much to the relief of several who knew

they had not been doing as well as they might—the “ax” being the reporter’s slang for getting discharged.

When the last edition had been run off on the thundering presses in the basement, the reporters gathered in small groups in different parts of the room, and began talking over the events of the day. Larry saw his friend Harvey Newton come in from an assignment.

“How did you make out to-day, Larry?” asked Mr. Newton.

“Pretty fair,” responded the boy. “I didn’t have any big stories, though.”

“They’ll come in time. Better go slow and sure.”

“Did you strike anything good?”

“Not much. I’ve been down to City Hall all day, working on a tip I got of some land deal a political gang is trying to put through. Something about a big tract in the Bronx, but I didn’t land it.”

The remark made Larry stop and think. He remembered his mother had, among her papers, a deed to some land in that section of New York City called the Bronx, because it was near a small river of that name. The land had been taken by Mr. Dexter in connection with some deal, and had never been considered of any value. One day, as told in the previous volume, Mrs. Dexter was about to destroy the old deed, but Larry restrained her. He thought the land might

some day be of value. So the document was put away.

When Mr. Newton spoke Larry wondered if, by any chance, the land the reporter mentioned as being that over which a political deal was being made, could be located near that which was represented by the old deed. He made up his mind to speak of it some time.

It was now about four o'clock, and, as the reporters went off duty in half an hour, Mr. Emborg was busy over the assignment book.

The *Leader* was an afternoon paper, but sometimes there were things occurring at night that had to be "covered" or attended to in order to get an account of them for the next day. Usually only very important events were covered at night by the *Leader*, since the morning paper or news associations, got accounts of them.

Mr. Emborg came over toward Larry with a slip of paper in his hand.

"How would you like to try your hand at a funny story?" the city editor asked the boy.

"I'd like to, only I don't know that I could do it. What sort of a story is it?"

"Amateur night at a theater. Did you ever see one?"

Larry said he had not, and Mr. Emborg explained that the managers of certain cheap theaters, in order to get some variety, frequently had amateur nights at their playhouses. They would allow any one who came along to go on

the stage between the acts of the regular performance, and sing, dance, recite, do feats of strength, or whatever the amateur considered his specialty.

The audience, for the most part made up of young men and women, seldom had much sympathy to waste on the amateurs, and it must be a very brave youth or maiden who essayed to do a "stunt" under the circumstances.

"Here are two tickets to the Jollity Theater," said Mr. Emborg. "Go up there to-night, take someone with you if you like, and give us a good funny story to-morrow."

Larry was delighted at being able to go to the theater without paying, but he was a little doubtful of his ability to do the story. However, he resolved to try. He told his mother of it at supper that night.

"I'll take Jimmy with me," said Larry.

"I'm afraid your brother's too young to go out, as you will have to stay rather late," said Mrs. Dexter. "Can't you take Harry Lake?" referring to a boy who lived on the floor below the Dexter apartments.

"I guess I will," replied the young reporter, and soon he and Harry were on their way to the theater.

The play was one of the usual melodramatic sort, but to Larry and Harry it was very interesting. They watched eagerly through the first act, as did hundreds around them, but there was

more interest displayed when the manager came before the curtain.

He announced that a number of amateurs had come to go through their various "turns," and added that they would be allowed to stay and amuse the audience as long as the latter seemed to care for the offerings. When too much displeasure was manifested the performers would be obliged to withdraw, being forcibly reminded to leave, sometimes, by being pulled from the boards by a long-handled hook which the stage hands stuck out from the wings, or sides of the stage.

"Johnny Carroll, in a song and dance specialty," announced the manager as the first number, and then he retired to give place to Johnny. The latter proved to be a tall, thin youth, who shuffled out upon the stage and stood there looking about rather sheepishly.

"Ladies an' gen'men," he began in such weak tones that someone shouted:

"Take your voice out yer pocket!"

"I'm goin' t' dance a jig!" cried Johnny, defiantly, and the orchestra struck up a lively tune. Three times the young performer tried to get into step, but something seemed to be the matter with his feet, for they would not jig. A general laugh ran around.

"I'm goin' t' sing!" cried Johnny, in desperation. "I'll give you that latest song success, entitled, 'Give Me Another Transfer, This One Has Expired,' " and the orchestra began playing

the opening strains. Johnny opened his mouth to sing, but, as his voice was rather less harmonious than a crow's, he was met with howls of laughter.

"T'ou't ye was goin' t' sing!" someone in the top gallery shouted.

"Give me a chanst!" pleaded the performer.

"Get the hook! Get the hook!" shouted several, and out from the wings came an instrument like a shepherd's crook. Johnny was removed from the stage, protesting in vain.

"Sammy Snipe will play the mouth organ," announced the manager, and Sammy came on. He seemed to be an old hand at the turn, for he entered with an air of confidence, and was greeted with some applause. He lost no time in talking, but began to play, and made not unmusical sounds on the harmonica. He made a "hit" with the audience, and there were no discouraging remarks. Sammy played several popular airs, and then tried to play a jig and dance it at the same time. Sammy would have done better, however, to have stopped when he had the approval of his audience. Unfortunately he could not divide his attention between his playing and his dancing. While he could do either separately, when he essayed both he found he had tried to cover too much territory. He started off on a lively air, but, no sooner had he danced a few steps, than he forgot to keep playing, and he soon lost time. Then he tried to start dancing, and come in with

the music when he had the jig going well. This, too, failed, for he soon forgot to dance, and only played.

"Take him away; he's no good!" the audience shouted, and then came the fatal call: "Get the hook!" and Sammy was removed.

Next a young woman appeared who tried to recite "Curfew Shall Not Ring To-night!" The audience either had no regard for the curfew, or did not care to hear anything tragic. The young woman got as far as the third line when there was a series of groans that indicated anything but enjoyment.

"Ding-dong! Ten o'clock! Time's up!" called someone, and the performer retired in confusion.

Larry and Harry were enjoying the efforts of the amateurs more than they had the real show. They were anxious for the second act to be over to see what the unprofessional performers would offer next.

When the curtain was rung down the second time, leaving the heroine in great trouble and distress, the next amateur performer was another young woman who wanted to recite. She selected "Paul Revere's Ride," and began in a loud tone: "Listen, my Children——" but she had only gone that far when someone in a high falsetto voice called out:

"Oh mercy, mother, did you put the cat out, and lock the door?"

This was too much for the elocutionist, and

she rushed off the stage in confusion. Next appeared a tall young man with light hair, and a purple necktie, who tried to sing: "Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming." He managed to make himself heard through two lines, and then such a chorus of yells, whistles, and cat-calls, mingled with "Get the hook!" broke out, that he had to stand helpless. He was game, however, and Larry could see, by the motion of the youth's lips, that the performer was going through with the song. But not a sound of it was heard, and there was no second verse.

This was followed by two boys who managed to get through some buck and wing dancing, winning hearty applause. Next there was a youth who essayed a tumbling act.

He, too, seemed to please, and did not get the "hook." Not so fortunate, however, was the following performer, who was announced as a "strong man."

Several stage hands carried a number of heavy weights out on the boards. The "strong man" in pink tights, making several bows, lifted a few dumb-bells.

"Aw, I kin do that meself!" exclaimed a disgusted newsboy, leaning far over the edge of the gallery. "Do a hard one, or go back home."

The performer next tackled a big dumb-bell that must have weighed several hundred pounds. Either he had underestimated its heft, or he had overestimated his powers, for he could not budge

it. He strained and tugged, but the bell did not move.

"Fake! No good! Get the hook!" were some of the cries that greeted the man.

He was pulled from the stage by some of the hands, and two of them came on to move the weights. Then it was disclosed that a trick had been played on the "strong" man for the big dumb-bell was merely made of wood, painted to resemble iron. It had been fastened to the floor with hooks, which accounted for the inability of the performer to move it.

One of the stage hands, unfastening the bell, lifted it easily with one hand. Then the laughter broke out louder than ever, Larry and Harry joining in.

Between the third and fourth acts other amateurs appeared. Some did fairly well, but most of them had a bad attack of stage fright, or were scared by the remarks made to them by the audience. Altogether it was a funny experience.

Larry was so anxious to make a good story that he sat up after he reached home that night, and wrote it out, just as he had seen it. He gave it a lively touch, and made the most of the situations. It was with some anxiousness, however, that he placed the story on Mr. Emberg's desk the next morning.

CHAPTER III

ON TRACK OF A DEAL

"WHAT'S this?" asked the city editor.

"That story of amateur night," replied Larry.

"Oh, yes, I'd forgotten all about it. I'm glad you have the copy in early, as I want you to make a quick trip out of town."

"Any more floods?" asked Larry, thinking of the big one he had helped cover when he was a copy boy.

"Not this time; this is only to take a run over to New Jersey, to a little town called Cranford."

"What's the matter out there?"

"I want you to see Professor Allen. He is to deliver a lecture at the dinner of the Engineers' Club to-night, and he has promised a copy of his remarks in advance."

Larry was soon on his way, crossing the Hudson River on the ferry to the New Jersey side, where he took a train for Cranford. He found Professor Allen's house without much trouble, and inquired for the gentleman.

"I don't believe you can see him," replied the girl who answered the door.

"Why not; isn't he at home?" asked Larry.

"Well, he is and he isn't," replied the servant. "You see he's out in his laboratory making experiments, which is what he's most always up to, and he hasn't been in to his meals for a week."

"Hasn't he eaten for a week?" asked Larry, in some surprise.

"Oh, bless your heart, of course he's eaten, but he will not come to the table. His wife has to go out to the laboratory with a plate of victuals and a cup of coffee, and fairly feed him."

"What's the trouble?"

"Oh, you see he's working on a new invention."

"What sort?" asked Larry, thinking he might get a story out of it.

"Don't ask me," cried the servant, with a laugh, for she evidently took Larry for some boy on an errand. "It's all about wheels and levers and steam and electricity. As near as I can get at, it's a plan to make an automobile out of a tea kettle."

"Don't you suppose I could see the professor?" asked the young reporter.

"Well, you can try," said the girl. "The laboratory is that small white building down at the far end of the yard. Go down there, and walk right in. If you knock he'll never answer. Mrs. Allen has just fed him his breakfast, and perhaps he'll talk to you a little."

Larry decided this was the only way of securing what he wanted, so he made his way to the

laboratory, and, remembering the injunction, entered the door and walked in.

He found himself in a large room, fairly filled with machinery and appliances of all kinds. Overhead there were shafts and pulleys, while all about the sides were benches, lathes, wheels, levers, handles, and springs of various sorts.

Down in one corner was an elderly gentleman, in rather an old and ragged suit, at work over a bench. He did not look up as Larry entered, but called out:

"Come here and give me a hand with this. I'm in a hurry."

Larry looked around to see if the professor could be speaking to anyone else, but, finding that he was the only one in the room besides the scientist, the lad concluded he was the one addressed.

"Hurry, please," added Mr. Allen, looking straight at Larry. "I am in the midst of an important experiment."

Thereupon Larry went to the bench. Mr. Allen was holding one end of a long steel tube from which radiated several smaller tubes of glass. At one end of the steel tube was a rubber pipe which was attached to a gas jet, and at the other end of the tube there was another pipe which was fastened to a water faucet.

"Turn on the gas a little more, and then help me hold this tube," spoke the scientist. "I am generating steam."

He spoke as though it was the most natural thing in the world for Larry to be there, and give him assistance. Larry recognized that Mr. Allen was too much absorbed in his experiment to care who helped him, so the boy lent a hand.

Larry turned the gas on, and then grasped one end of the tube. Mr. Allen held the other. There was a curious rumbling sound, followed by a roar.

"Duck! She's going to explode again!" cried Mr. Allen, dropping his end of the tube, and crawling under a table. Larry lost no time in following his example. The next instant there was a loud report, and pieces of the tube and rubber hose were flying in all directions.

"It's all over, you can come out now," remarked the scientist, in a quiet voice, a few seconds later.

"Does it often act that way?" inquired Larry, earnestly.

"That's the twenty-seventh time it has blown up," replied the professor. "I guess the glass is not strong enough for the steam."

"Isn't it dangerous?" ventured Larry.

"Dangerous? Of course it is! That's what I expect in this business. But I have another tube here, and we'll try it again. Just take your coat off, and help me."

"I'm afraid I haven't time," replied the reporter. "I'm from the *New York Daily Leader*. I came to get a copy of your speech."

"What's that?" inquired Mr. Allen, sharply. Larry repeated his statement more fully.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the professor. "I took you for my assistant's son. He often helps me. I didn't get a good look at you, I was so busy thinking about this steam problem. I hope you were not hurt when the explosion came."

"Not a bit," replied Larry.

"Father! Father! Are you injured?" cried a voice, and a woman, much excited, hurried into the laboratory.

"Not a bit, my dear, not a bit," replied the professor, as he brushed the dust from his clothes. "Another tube blew up, that's all," and he seemed as cheerful as though the experiment had succeeded.

"Oh, those horrible, dangerous steam tubes!" exclaimed the lady. Then she saw Larry, and, observing he was a stranger, was about to withdraw.

"This is a reporter from the New York *Leader*," explained the scientist. "He has come for a copy of my speech, and it's a good thing he did. I had forgotten all about delivering it tonight. I guess I'll go in the house, and get ready. Come with me," he added to Larry, "and I'll get the copy for you."

"Thank goodness something happened to make him come back to civilization," remarked the lady to Larry, as they walked toward the house. "He has slept in that laboratory, and taken his

meals there ever since he started on this latest idea. It's a good thing you came along, and awakened him to some realization that there's something in this world besides those terrible steam tubes."

"Perhaps the explosion did," ventured Larry.

"That? It would take more than an explosion," the lady, who was Mr. Allen's daughter, replied. "He's used to them."

Larry went into the house, where, after some search, Mr. Allen found a copy of his remarks, which he gave to the young reporter.

"Come out and see me again some day," the scientist invited Larry. "We'll try that experiment again."

"I'm afraid once is enough for me," said Larry, with a smile.

He reached his office shortly after noon, and, handing in the copy of the speech, which had been gotten in advance, so as to be set up ready for the next day's paper. Then he reported at the desk, announcing to Mr. Emborg that he was ready for another assignment.

"Take a run down to City Hall," said the city editor. "Mr. Newton is covering it to-day, but he is busy on a story, and he telephoned in he had no time to make all the rounds of the offices. Just see if there are any routine matters he had to overlook."

It was the first time Larry had ever been assigned to the municipal building alone. He was

familiar with most of the offices and knew some of the officials by sight, as Mr. Newton had frequently taken him around to "learn him the ropes," as he said. So Larry felt not a little elated, and began to dream of the time when he might have important assignments, such as looking after city matters and politics, matters to which New York papers pay great attention.

Larry went into several offices at the hall, and found there was no news. It was rather a dull day along municipal and political lines, and there were few reporters around the building. Larry knew some of them, who nodded to him in a friendly way, and asked him whether there was "anything new," a reporter's manner of inquiring for news.

As Larry had nothing he said so, it being a sort of unwritten law among newspaper men not to beat each other on routine assignments, unless there was some special story they were after.

It was almost closing hour at the hall, and within a few minutes of the time the *Leader's* last edition went to press, that Larry entered the anteroom of the City Comptroller's office. He hardly expected there would be any news, and he knew if there was it was almost too late for that day. However, he was tired, and, as there were comfortable chairs in the office, he resolved to have a few minutes' rest, while waiting to see the official or the chief clerk to ask if there was anything new.

It was while sitting there, with his chair tilted back against a thin partition, that Larry overheard voices in somewhat loud conversation. At first he paid little attention to the matter. But when one of the voices became quite loud he could not help hearing.

"I tell you I've got the whole plan outlined, and we can all make big money by it," someone remarked. "I know the lay of the land. It's up in the Bronx."

At that Larry began to take some notice, as he remembered he and his mother were interested in some Bronx property.

"The deal is going through, then?" asked another man.

"Sure."

Now Larry had no intention of eavesdropping, and, if he had thought the conversation was of a private nature, he would have moved away. But it seemed the men had nothing to conceal, for they talked loudly. They were probably unaware that a transom over the door of the room where they were, was open.

"What makes you so sure the land will be valuable?" asked another voice.

"Because I know it," came the answer from the one who had first spoken. "There's going to be an ordinance introduced in the Common Council soon. Now all we have to do is to buy up all the lots——" What followed was in a low tone, and Larry could not hear. Then the

voice went on: "It's a great game, for it will take our votes to pass the ordinance, see?"

"Won't there be some danger?" asked someone.

"Not a bit. There's only one hitch. I've been looking the thing up, and I find that the most valuable strip of land in the whole tract is owned by some man up New York State."

"Who is he?"

"Something like Pexter or Wexter," was the reply, whereat Larry felt his heart beating strongly. Suppose it should happen to be the land for which his mother held the deed?

"Can we put the deal through?" several asked of the man who was doing the most talking.

"Sure we can," was the answer. "Alderman——"

"Hush! Not so loud!" cautioned a voice.

"Close that transom," ordered someone, and then Larry moved away, fearing the men might come out, and find him listening. He wanted to know more of the matter, for he felt sure some underhanded game was afoot.

That afternoon, on the way home, Larry told Mr. Newton of what he had heard.

"I'll bet there's some sort of a deal on," said the older reporter. "Glad you happened to overhear that, Larry. I'll get busy on the tip, and maybe we can block the game."

CHAPTER IV

ON A CHOWDER PARTY

"I've got a little trip out of town for you, Larry," said Mr. Emborg the next morning. "There will not be much work attached to it, unless something unexpected happens."

"What sort of an assignment is it?" asked Larry.

"The Eighth Ward Democratic Club is going to have an outing to Coney Island," replied the city editor. "It's a clam chowder party, and, while it is mainly to give the members of the association a good time, there may be some politics discussed."

"I'm afraid I don't know much about politics," answered Larry, somewhat doubtful of his ability to cover that kind of an assignment.

"You'll never learn any younger," was Mr. Emborg's rejoinder, as he smiled at Larry. "Get me a good story of what the men do, and I guess you'll not miss much. There are going to be some games down at the beach, in the afternoon, races and so on, that may make something funny to write about."

Mr. Emborg gave Larry a ticket to the chowder outing, and told him where to take the boat.

"You're in luck, kid," remarked one of the older reporters, as he saw the "cub" start on his assignment.

"How so?" asked Larry.

"Why, there's nothing to do except enjoy the trip, eat a good dinner, and sit off in the shade in the afternoon. It's one of the few decent things we fall into in this business."

"Well, if I can get a good story that's all I care about," responded Larry, who had not been a reporter long enough to lose his early enthusiasm. He was always looking for a chance to get a good story, and no less on this occasion when there was not much of an opportunity.

Larry made his way to the dock whence the boat was to leave. He found a crowd of men at the wharf, all of them wearing gaily-colored badges, for the Eighth Ward Democratic Club was one of the most influential and largest political organizations in New York.

At the dock all was hurry and excitement. A band was playing lively airs, and a number of fat men were wiping the perspiration from their brows, for it was August, and a hot day, and they had marched half-way around the ward before coming to the boat.

Scores of men were piling good things to eat on the boat, for political outings seem to be always regarded as hungry affairs. Larry saw a number of other reporters whom he knew slightly, and spoke to them. Soon all the newspaper men

formed a crowd among themselves, and found a comfortable place on the boat, where they sat and talked "shop."

The older reporters discussed politics, and the younger ones conversed about the assignments they had recently covered. For, curiously enough, though a reporter sees much of life of various sorts that might furnish topics of conversation, no sooner do two or more of them get together than they begin discussions of matters connected directly with their work. Perhaps this is so because everything in life concerns reporters, more or less.

Lunch was served on the boat when it was about half-way to the Island, and Larry thought he never had tasted anything so good, for the salt air made him very hungry. Then such a dinner as there was when the grove where the club held its outings was reached.

There was a regular old-fashioned clam chowder and clam-bake in preparation. First came the chowder, which, instead of taking the edges from sharp appetites, seemed only to increase them. Then the members of the club and their friends strolled about, sat under trees, or gathered in little groups to talk, while the clam-bake was being made ready.

Larry thought perhaps he had better go about, and see if he could pick up any political tips. He spoke about it to one of the other reporters, but the latter said:

"There, now, don't worry about that, Larry. The only time when politics will crop out, if they do at all, is after they've had their dinners. That will loosen their tongues, and we may pick up something."

So Larry decided he might spend some time watching the men prepare the clam-bake.

First they built a big fire of wood in a sort of hollow in the ground. The blaze was so hot it was most uncomfortable to go close to it, but the cook and his assistants did not appear to mind it. They put scores of stones in the blaze, and the cobbles were soon glowing with the heat. Occasionally one would crack, and the pieces flew all about.

"Ever get hit?" asked Larry, of the cook.

"Once or twice, but I'm getting so I can dodge 'em now."

Just then came another crack, and the cook ducked quickly, as a large piece of stone flew over his head. He laughed, and Larry joined him. When the stones were hot enough the men raked away the charred wood and embers, and then piled the stones up in a round heap. They were so hot that the men had to use long-handled rakes and pitchforks.

On top of the cobbles was thrown a quantity of wet seaweed, which sent up a cloud of vapor. Then the cook and his helpers began piling on top of the steaming weed bushels of clams, scores of lobsters, whole chickens, crabs, potatoes, corn

on the cob, and other things. Then the whole mass was covered with more seaweed, and over all a big canvas was spread.

"There, now, it will cook in about an hour," said the cook, who seemed to have removed considerable anxiety from his mind.

"Don't you build more fire on it?" asked Larry, who had never been at a clam-bake.

"Not a bit. The hot stones do all the cooking now," responded the cook.

And so it proved, for in about an hour the canvas was taken off, the weed removed, and there the whole mass of victuals was cooked to a turn. The men gathered around the table, places were found for the reporters, and the feast began. Larry ate so many clams, and so much lobster and chicken, that he feared he would not be able to hold a pencil to take notes, providing anyone was left alive to write about. Everyone seemed to be trying to outdo his neighbor in the amount of food consumed.

But it was a healthful way in which to dine, and no ill effects seemed to follow the clam-bake. An hour's rest in the shade followed, and then it was announced that the games would be started.

A sack race was the first on the programme, and the contestants, of whom there were eight, allowed themselves to be tied up in bags, which reached to their necks. At the word they started to waddle toward the goal.

There was one very fat man and one thin one

who seemed to be doing better than any of the others. They both took little steps inside the bags, and were distancing their competitors.

"Go it, Fatty!" called the stout man's friends.

"You'll win, Skinny!" shouted the advocates of the tall, thin one.

The latter began to forge ahead, and, it seemed, would win the race.

"Lie down and roll!" shouted someone to the fat man.

"Dot's a good ideanness!" answered the fleshy contestant, who spoke with a strong German accent.

He fell upon his knees, and then toppled over on his side on the green grass over which the course was laid. There was a general laugh, most persons thinking the man had fallen, and was out of the race. But not so with the fleshy one. He began rolling over and over, his roundity and the soft sod preventing him from being hurt. He kept his head away from the ground, and, so rapidly did he revolve that, inside of two minutes he had passed the thin man. The latter in his efforts to come in first took too long steps, his feet got tangled up inside the sack, and he went sprawling on his face.

"I vins!" exclaimed the German, as he rolled over for the last time, and bumped into the goal post.

"You didn't win fair!" cried the thin man, trying to talk with his mouth filled with grass.

"Shure I dit!" the fleshy one exclaimed. "Vat's der rules?"

"That's right, he wins under the rules," announced the man in charge of the games. "Contestants could walk, run, or roll. Fatty wins and gets the prize."

"Vot iss dot prize?" asked the German, while some of his friends took him out of the bag.

"This beautiful medal," replied the man in charge, and he handed the winner a large one made of leather, on which was burned a picture of a donkey. There was a burst of laughter, in which the butt of the joke had to join.

After this came a potato race, in which each contestant had to carry the tubers one at a time, in a spoon, and the one who brought the most to the goal received five dollars. Following there was a wheelbarrow contest, in which the smallest members of the club were obliged to wheel the largest and fattest ones. It was hard on the thin men, but the others appeared to enjoy it.

A swimming race to see who could catch a greased duck caused lots of fun. The men put on bathing suits, and scores of them went into the water.

"Don't some of you reporters want to join the sport?" asked one of the entertainment committee. Some of the newspaper men did, and said so. Larry resolved to enter, for he was a good swimmer. Soon he had borrowed a suit, and was splashing around with the others. All was in

readiness for the contest. The duck was released at the far side of a small cove, the swimmers starting from the opposite shore.


Such shouting, laughing, splashing, and sport as there was! Half the men had no intention of catching the duck, but, instead, took the opportunity of ducking some of their companions under water. Larry had no idea of catching the fowl, since he saw several men try, and lose their grip because of the oil on the duck's feathers.

"Five dollars to whoever catches the bird!" shouted a man on shore, watching the struggle. At this there was a general rush for the unfortunate fowl. She was caught once or twice, but managed to slip away, leaving a few feathers behind.

"I'm going to catch her," said Larry to himself. He waited a good opportunity when the duck was in a comparatively free space in the water. Then Larry began swimming slowly toward her. The duck did not see him approaching, and was paddling about. When about ten feet away Larry dived, and began swimming under water. He rose right under the duck, grabbed the fowl by the legs, and held her fast, swimming toward shore with his free arm.

A cheer greeted him as he waded out with the prize.

"There's your money!" exclaimed the man who offered it, handing Larry a five-dollar gold piece.



CHAPTER V

MAN OVERBOARD!

SEVERAL other reporters gathered about Larry, who stood blushing at the attention he was attracting. He hardly knew whether to accept the money or not. One of his fellow newspaper workers saw his confusion.

"Take it," he whispered. "It's all in the game, and you won it fairly. I'll keep it for you until you get dressed."

Larry accepted the offer, and gave the money to his friend, who put it in his pocket until the lad had his clothes on once more.

There were a number of other games and sports after this, and then the members of the club, thoroughly tired out with the day's fun, went aboard the boat for the trip home. There was not much excitement on the way back, and Larry was beginning to fear he might have missed the story.

He thought perhaps there had been politics talked which he had not overheard, and he was worried lest Mr. Emberg would think he had not properly covered the assignment.

Larry ventured to hint at this to some of the other reporters, but they all told him that, con-

trary to all expectations, there had been no politics worth mentioning discussed on the outing.

"Just make a general story of it," advised the reporter who had held the money for Larry. "None of us are looking for a beat."

So Larry made his mind easier. A little later the boat made a stop at a dock to let off several members who had decided to go the rest of the way home by train. The newspaper men, with the exception of Larry, decided, also, to go home on the railroad.

"Better come along," they said to Larry. "You'll get no more story."

"Probably not," rejoined Larry, "but I'll stay just the same. The boss told me to keep on the job until it was over, and it isn't over until the boat ties up at the last dock."

"You'll soon get over that nonsense," said the reporter, with a laugh, as he left the craft. The boat resumed her way up the river, and Larry, who was quite tired out, was beginning to think he was to have his trouble for his pains in explicitly following instructions. There seemed no more chance for news, since most of the men were resting comfortably in chairs, or lounging half-asleep in the cabins. Even the band was too tired to play.

It was getting dusk, and Larry was wondering what time he would get home. He walked about the upper deck, and gazed off across the water.

Suddenly there sounded a commotion on the

deck below him. Then came a splash in the water.

"Man overboard! Man overboard!" sung out several deckhands. "Lower a boat!"

At once the steamer was the scene of confusion. Men were running to and fro, a hurried jangle of bells came from the engine room, and the craft slackened speed.

"Turn on the searchlight!" cried someone, and soon the beams from the big glaring beacon were gleaming on the dark waters aft the boat.

"There he is, I see his head!" cried someone at the stern, casting a life buoy toward the figure of the man who had toppled over the rail.

"Who is it?"

"Who threw him in?"

"How did it happen?"

"Is he dead?"

These were a few of the confused cries that came from all parts of the steamer. But while most of the excursionists were greatly excited, the members of the crew of the craft remained calm. They quickly lowered a boat, and, by the aid of the glare from the searchlight, were able to pick out the swimming figure of the man. They headed the boat toward him, and in a little while hauled him into the small skiff. Then they rowed back to the steamer, the rail of which was crowded with anxious friends of the unlucky one.

"Did you save him?" they cried, for they could

not see whether their friend was in the boat or not.

"Sure!" cried several of the crew, and one added: "He's all the better for a little salt water!"

"This will make a good part of the story," thought Larry, as he watched the craft drawing nearer. "I guess the other fellows will wish they had stayed aboard."

When the skiff reached the steamer, and the crew, and rescued one, had been taken aboard, there were scores of demands to know how it all happened.

"I'll tell you," said the victim of the accident. "I was sleeping on two camp-stools close to the rail. I got to dreaming I was making a political speech, and I was walking up and down the platform telling the audience what a fine party the Democratic one is.

"I must have walked a little too far, for, the first thing I knew, I had stepped over the edge of the platform, and the next thing I knew I was falling. I woke up in the river, and struck out. That's about all."

"Lucky for you the searchlight was working," remarked one of the man's friends, "or you might have been on the bottom of the river by now."

"Well, you see," said the man, with a smile, as he wiped the water from his eyes. "I ate so many clams, lobsters, and crabs to-day that when

I got down there the river thought I was a sort of a fish, and so it didn't drown me."

Larry made inquiry, and found out the man's name. He made notes of the occurrence, and, the next morning, on reaching the office, wrote up a lively story of the happening.

He said nothing to Mr. Emborg about being the only reporter on the boat when the thing happened. But that afternoon, when all the other papers came out, and, like the morning issues, had no account of the rescue of the man, who was a prominent politician, the city editor said:

"I hope you weren't 'faking' that story, Larry?" and Mr. Emborg looked serious, for he did not want any of the reporters to "fake," or write untrue accounts of matters.

"No, sir, it actually happened," said Larry, and he related how he came to be the only newspaper reporter at the scene. A little later Mr. Newton came in.

"Say," he asked, "did we have a story of a man falling overboard on that Democratic outing? I just heard of it on the street as I was coming in."

He had not been in that morning, being out of town on a story.

"Oh, Larry was on hand as usual," replied the city editor, for by this time he was convinced that Larry's account was true. "He has given us another beat."

And so it proved, for the *Leader* was the only

paper in New York that had an account of the incident, and nearly all of the later editions of the afternoon sheets had to use the story, copying it from the *Leader*.

"It was a good beat, and a good story of the outing besides," said Mr. Emberg, shortly after the last edition had gone to press, for he liked the half-humorous manner in which Larry had written about the sack race and the other sports in which the members of the club had indulged. "You are doing fine work," he added, at which praise Larry felt much gratified.

Things were slacking up a bit in the office, now that the paper had gone to press for the day, when one of the reporters who was looking over the front page suddenly cried out:

"Here's a bad mistake in that account of the meeting of the County Republican Committee last night. It says Jones voted for Smith for chairman, and that's wrong. I was there. The compositor must have made a mistake. It ought to be corrected, or it will make trouble."

"I'm afraid it's too late," remarked Mr. Emberg, as he grabbed a paper to see the error. "The presses are running, and part of the last edition is off. The only way we can do is to have them smash Jones's name, and blur it so no one can tell what it is. That's what I'll do."

He tore part of the page off, marked out the name to be smashed, and called to Larry, there being no copy boys in the room then:

"Here, Larry, go down in the pressroom, and tell Dunn, the foreman, to smash that name."

Though Larry had been on the paper some time he had never been in the pressroom. Nor did he know what the operation of smashing a name might mean, but he decided the best thing to do would be to carry the message.

He hurried down to the basement. As soon as he opened the door leading to it, down a steep flight of steps, Larry thought he had gotten into a boiler factory by mistake. The noise was deafening, and the presses were thundering away like some giant machine grinding tons of rocks to atoms.

Half-naked men were running about here and there. In one corner was a furnace full of melted lead for making the stereotype plates. Larry made his way through the maze of wheels, machinery, and presses.

He was met by a youth whose face was covered with ink.

"Where's Mr. Dunn?" asked Larry, shouting at the top of his voice.

The youth did not bother to answer in words. He had been in the pressroom long enough to know the uselessness of trying to make himself heard above the din. He had understood Larry's question from watching his lips, and pointed over in one corner.

There Larry found a quiet man marking something in a book.

"Mr. Emberg says to smash that name!" yelled the boy, handing over the paper. He was afraid he had not made himself heard, but Mr. Dunn seemed to comprehend, for he nodded several times, though he did not seem pleased. He hated to stop the presses, once they were running, until all the edition was off.

However, it had to be done. He left his corner, and went around the rear of the ponderous machine, where the paper, in a large roll, was fed in at one end, to emerge, folded and printed sheets, at the other. Mr. Dunn seized a rope, and yanked it. A bell rang, and the press began to slacken up.

The type from which the paper was printed was cast in one solid sheet, there being several of the sheets, just the size of a page. Each one was half-circular, and fitted around a cylinder on the press. This cylinder whirled around, and the paper, passing under it in a continuous roll, received the impressions.

Once the press was stopped Mr. Dunn crawled up into a sort of hole in front of the cylinder. Then he had the press worked slowly, until the particular page he had to reach came into view.

Next, with a hammer and chisel he smashed the name of Jones so that it was a meaningless blur. After that the press started its thundering again. The remainder of the papers would not contain the name of Jones, and so there would

be no danger of that gentleman coming in and demanding an apology for a misstatement made about him. Often papers have to resort to this emergency when it is too late to correct directly in type an error that has been made.

CHAPTER VI

LARRY IN DANGER

WHEN Larry was eating supper that night he happened to glance out of the window. He saw an unusual light in the sky, and first took it for a glow from some gas furnace or smelting works across on the Jersey shore. But, as he watched, the light grew more brilliant, and there was a cloud of smoke and a shower of sparks.

"That's a big fire!" he exclaimed, jumping up.

"You're not going to it, are you, Larry?" asked his mother.

"I think I'd better," he replied. "Most of the men are working to-night, and none of them may go to the blaze. If we want a good story we must be right on the spot. So I think I'll go, though I may find Mr. Newton or someone else covering it."

"Well, be careful, and don't go too near," cautioned Mrs. Dexter, who was quite nervous.

"I'll look out for myself," said Larry, with all the assurance lads usually have.

"Take me to the fire, I'll help you report it," begged Jimmy.

"Not to-night," answered Larry. "It's probably a good way off, and you'd get tired."

"Then you can carry me," spoke the little fellow, ready to cry at not being allowed to go.

"You stay here, and I'll tell you a story," promised Lucy, who had grown to be a strong, healthy girl since the surgical operation. "I'll tell you about Jack the Giant Killer."

"Will you truly?" cried Jimmy. "Then I don't care about the old fire."

He climbed up into his sister's lap, and soon was deeply interested in the story. Larry got on his hat and coat, and started out on the run. He found a big crowd in the street, hurrying toward the fire.

"They say it's a gas tank," said someone.

"I heard it was an armory," remarked another.

"It's neither; it's a big hotel, and about a hundred people are burned to death," put in a third.

"Whatever it is, it's surely a big fire," was a fourth man's response as he started to run.

Larry wanted to get to the fire in a hurry, so he asked the first policeman he met where the blaze was. Learning that it was well up town, though the glare in the sky made it seem nearer, Larry decided to get on an elevated train to save a long walk.

As he neared the scene he could see the sky growing brighter, and the cloud of smoke increasing in volume. The trail of sparks across the heavens became larger. Down in the street an ever-increasing throng was hastening toward the conflagration.

Larry dashed from the train as it slacked up at the station nearest the fire. He ran down the stairs, and through the streets. As he came into view of the blaze he saw it was a big drygoods store, which was a mass of fire. It evidently had secured a good start, as every window was belching tongues of yellow flame.

Larry found a crowd of policemen lined up some distance away from the conflagration, keeping people back of the fire lines. Fortunately Larry had a newspaper badge with him, and the sight of this, with a statement that he was from the *Leader*, soon gained him admittance within the cordon.

He could not but think of the first time he had been at a fire in New York, how he had helped Mr. Newton, and, incidentally, got his place on the paper.

But there was no time for idle speculation. The fire was making rapid headway, and, in response to a third and fourth alarm that the chief had sent in, several more engines were thundering up, and taking their places near water hydrants, their whistles screeching shrilly, and the horses prancing and dancing on the stones from which their iron-shod hoofs struck sparks in profusion.

Larry made a quick circle of the building, which occupied an entire block, but failed to see any reporters from the *Leader*. He knew it was only chance that would bring them to the place,

since most of them had assignments in different parts of the city.

"I guess I'll have to cover this all alone," thought Larry. "And it's going to be a big job."

In fact, it was one of the worst and largest fires New York ever had. It was no small task for several reporters to cover it, and for a young and inexperienced one to undertake it was almost out of the question. But Larry decided that he would do his best.

He went at it in a business-like way, noting the size and general shape of the building, and how the fire was spreading. Then he found how many engines were on hand, and from a group of policemen, who had nothing in particular to do except keep the throng back, Larry learned that the fire had been discovered in the basement about half an hour before. One of the bluecoats told how two janitors in the place had been obliged to slide down a rope, as they were caught by the flames on a side of the building where there were no fire escapes.

Larry got the names of the men from a policeman whose beat took in the store, and who knew them. Then he heard of several other interesting details, which he jotted down. All the while he was hoping some other *Leader* men would happen along to aid him, and relieve him of some responsibility. But none came.

The store was now a raging furnace. The whole scene was one of magnificent if terrible

splendor. High in the air shot a shower of sparks, and every now and then a wall would fall in with a crash that sounded loud above the puffing of the engines, the shrill tootings of the whistles, and the hoarse cries of the firemen.

With a rattle louder than any of the apparatus that had preceded it, the water tower dashed up. It had been sent for when the chief saw that with the ordinary machines he would be unable to cope with the raging flames.

Under the power of compressed air the tower rose high, a long, thin tube of steel. Hose lines from several steamers were quickly attached, and the engines began pumping.

Out of the end of the tube shot a powerful stream of water that fairly tore out part of a side wall it was directed against, and spurted in on the forked tongues that were leaping up from the seething caldron of fire. A cheer went up from the big crowd that gathered as they saw the water tower come into play.

"That'll soon settle the fire!" cried one man, on the sidewalk, near where the young reporter was standing.

"It will take more than one tower to put out this blaze," rejoined a companion. "I believe it's spreading."

Others seemed to think so, too, for there were a number of quick orders from the chief, and his assistants ran to execute them. Two more water towers were soon on the scene, and then the fire

seemed to be in a fair way of being put under control.

Larry was busy going from one side to the other of the big block which the burning department store occupied. He saw several incidents that he made notes of, knowing they would add interest to the story he hoped to write.

On the north side of the structure there loomed a big blank wall, that as yet had not succumbed to the flames. A number of firemen were standing near the base of it, endeavoring to break a hole through so they might get a stream of water on the flames from that side, since to get a ladder to the top of the wall was impossible, as the flames were raging at the upper edge.

Larry paused to watch them. Fierce blows were struck at the masonry with sledges and axes. Pieces of bricks and mortar flew all about. The men had made a small hole, which they were rapidly enlarging when a hoarse voice cried:

"Back! back, men! For your lives! The wall is coming down!"

The fire-fighters needed no second warning. They dropped their implements, and sprang back. Then with a crash that sounded like an explosion, the entire wall toppled over into the street.

Several of the firemen were caught under the débris, and pinned down. Their cries for help brought scores of their comrades up on the run, and Larry pressed forward to see all there was, in order to put it into the story.

"Look out!" called a policeman guarding the fire lines. "More danger overhead!"

Almost as he spoke, a big piece of masonry toppled down, and landed in the street not two feet from where Larry was standing, peering forward to see how the firemen fared. If it had struck him he would have been killed.

"Easy there, men!" called an assistant chief. "Go slow!"

"We don't care for the danger! We're going to get the boys out!" cried several of the unfortunate men's comrades.

"All right, go ahead, I guess most of the wall's down now," spoke the assistant chief. "Here, you, young man!" he called to Larry. "What you doing here? Don't you know you nearly got killed then?"

"Yes, sir," replied Larry, trying to speak calmly. "But I'm a reporter, and I have to stay here."

"Oh, you're a reporter, eh?" asked the fireman, as he started in to help his men. "Well, I suppose you think you're like a cat, and have nine lives, but you'd better be careful! Now get back a bit, while we see if any of these poor fellows are alive."

Larry got some distance away, though not so far but that he could see what was going on. The crowd on this side had increased in size as the word went around that several firemen were buried in the ruins.

The rescuers worked madly, tearing at the hot bricks with picks and shovels. With crowbars they pried apart big masses of masonry. The lurid flames lighted up the scene with dancing tongues of fire, and the cries of the wounded mingled with the crackle of the blaze, the toots of the engines, and the hoarse yells of the men.

With loudly clanging bells several ambulances now drew up opposite where the imprisoned men were. They had been telephoned for as soon as it was known that an accident had occurred. After several minutes' work one of the firemen was taken out. The white-suited doctor hurried to his side, and bent over the man. He listened to his heart.

"It's too late," said the physician. "He's dead."

Something like a groan went up from the unfortunate fellow's comrades. It was quickly succeeded by a cheer, however, as another man was brought out. This one was very much alive.

"Be jabbers, b'ys!" he exclaimed, in jolly Irish accents, "it was a hot place ye took me from, more power t' ye!" and, wiggling out of the hold of his rescuers, the fireman began dancing a jig in the light of the flames.

In quick succession half a dozen more were taken out. There were no more dead bodies, but several of the men were badly hurt, and were hurried off to the hospitals. Larry got their names from other firemen, and jotted them down.

CHAPTER VII

LARRY HAS AN OFFER

THE young reporter had almost forgotten about his narrow escape, so anxious was he to get a good account of the fire, when he was surprised to hear a voice at his side saying:

"Are you trying to get all the good stories that happen?"

Larry looked up, and saw Mr. Newton.

"Golly, but I'm glad to see you!" said Larry.

"What's this I hear about you nearly getting caught under a wall?" asked Mr. Newton. "A policeman told me."

"It wasn't anything," replied Larry. "I was trying to get close to where the accident happened."

"There's such a thing as getting too close," remarked Mr. Newton, grimly. "Get the news, and don't be afraid, but don't go poking your head into the lion's mouth. You can take it easier now. I'm going to help you."

"Did you know I was here?" asked Larry.

"No. Mr. Emberg heard of the fire, and telephoned me I had better cover it."

"It's 'most over now," observed Larry.

"So I see," remarked Mr. Newton, as he noted

that the flames were dying out under the dampening influence of tons of water poured on them. "You've seen the best part of it. I suppose it will make a good story?"

"Fine," replied Larry. "I only hope I can write it up in good shape."

"I guess you can, all right," responded Mr. Newton. "I'll help you. Perhaps you had better go home now, as your mother might be worried about you."

Larry agreed that this was a good plan, and made his way through the crowd to a car, which he boarded for his home, arriving somewhat after midnight.

His mother was sitting up waiting for him, and was somewhat alarmed at his absence, as rumors of the big fire had spread downtown, and it was said that a number had been killed.

"I'm so glad you were not hurt, Larry," said she. "I hope you were in no danger."

"Not very much," replied Larry, for he did not think it well to tell his mother how nearly he had been hurt.

When Mr. Emberg learned the next day that Larry had, without being particularly assigned to it, covered the big fire, the city editor was much pleased. He praised the lad highly, and said he appreciated what Larry had done.

The young reporter had his hands full that day writing an account of the fire. Mr. Newton gave him some help, but the story, in the main,

was Larry's, with some corrections the copy readers made.

"It's a story to be proud of," said Mr. Emberg, when the last edition had gone to press. "You are doing well, Larry."

One afternoon, several days later, when Larry had been sent to the City Hall to get some information about a report the municipal treasurer was about to submit, the boy was standing in the corridor, having telephoned the story in. He saw a short, dark-complexioned man, with a heavy black mustache walking up and down the marble-paved hall. Several times the stranger stopped, and peered at Larry.

"I hope he will recognize me when he sees me again," thought the lad.

"Hello, Larry," called a reporter on another paper, as he came from the tax office, where he had been in search of a possible story. "Anything good?"

"No," replied Larry. "I was down on that yarn about the treasurer's report. You got that, I guess."

"Oh, yes, we got that. Nothing else, eh?"

"Not that I know of. I'm just holding down the job until Mr. Newton gets back. He went out to get a bite to eat, and they didn't like to leave the Hall uncovered."

"Well, I guess you can hold it down all right," replied the other. "That was a good story of the fire that you wrote."

"Thanks," answered Larry, as his friend went away.

All this time the dark-complexioned stranger was walking up and down the corridor. Finally he came up to Larry, and asked:

"Is your name Larry Dexter?"

"Yes, sir," replied the reporter.

"You're on the *Leader*, aren't you?"

"That's the paper. Why, have you got a story?"

"No," answered the man, with a short laugh.

"I don't deal in stories, but I see you're wide awake, always on the lookout for 'em, eh?"

"Have to be."

"How would you like to get into some other line of business?" asked the man, coming closer, and dropping his voice to a whisper.

Larry thought the proceeding rather a strange one, but imagined the man might not intend anything more than a friendly interest.

"It depends on what sort of business," replied the youth.

"Do you like reporting very much?" the stranger went on.

"I do, so far."

"Isn't it rather hard work and poor pay?"

"Well, it's hard work sometimes, and then again it isn't. As for the pay, I guess I get all I'm worth."

"I'm in a position to get you a better job," the man continued. "I'm in a big real estate

firm, the Universal we call it, and we need a bright boy. I have some friends in the City Hall here, some of the aldermen, and they said you would be a good lad for the place."

"I don't know how the aldermen ever heard of me," remarked Larry.

"Well, I guess you've been around the Hall a good bit," the man went on. "You were at the insurance hearing, weren't you?"

"I carried copy for one of the reporters," said Larry.

"Well, anyhow," resumed the stranger, "do you think you'd like to work in a real estate office? There's plenty of chances to make money, besides what we would pay you as a salary. We could give you twenty dollars a week to start. How would that strike you?"

Larry was puzzled how to answer. The pay was five dollars a week more than he was getting, and if the man told the truth about the chance to make extra money, it might mean a good deal to the lad and his mother.

"I'll think about it," said the young reporter. "I'll have to talk with my mother about it."

"I've seen your mother, and she says it's all right," the man said, quickly. "If you want to you can come with me now, and I'll start you in at once. You'd better come. The offer is a good one, and I can't hold it open long."

Now Larry, though rather young, was inclined to be cautious. It seemed strange that a man,

whom, as far as the reporter knew, he had never seen before, should take such a sudden interest in him, and should even go to see Mrs. Dexter to ask if Larry could take another position. Then, too, the stranger seemed altogether too eager to get Larry to leave his position on the *Leader*. The man saw Larry's hesitancy.

"I'll make it twenty-five dollars a week," he said. "Better come."

"I can't decide right away," the boy returned. "I must see my mother."

"Do you doubt my word?" asked the stranger somewhat angrily.

"No," said Larry. "But even if my mother gave her permission I could not leave the *Leader* without giving some notice to Mr. Emborg. It would not be right."

"Don't worry about that," sneered the man. "They would never bother about giving you notice if they wanted you to leave. They'd fire you in a second, if it suited them. Why should you give any notice?"

The man appeared so eager, and seemed to place so much importance on Larry's taking the offer, that the boy became more suspicious than ever, that all was not as it should be.

"I will think it over," said he. "If you will leave me your card I'll write to you."

"If you don't take the offer at once I can't hold it open," said the man, in rather unpleasant tones. "However, here's my card. If you come

to your senses, and decide to work for my company, why, I'll see what I can do for you. Though I can't promise anything after to-day. You'll have to take your chance with others."

"I'll be willing to do that if I decide to come."

"Hello, Larry!" exclaimed a voice, and Mr. Newton came around the corner of the corridor. "You here yet?"

"I was waiting for you to come back," replied Larry. "Mr. Emberg told me to stay, and see that nothing broke loose while you were at lunch."

"Anything doing?"

"Not a thing." Larry turned to see if the stranger was at his side, but, to his surprise, the man had vanished.

"What did he want?" asked Mr. Newton, with a nod of his head toward where the man had been standing.

"Why, he wanted me to leave the *Leader*, and take a position with some real estate firm," answered Larry.

"Don't you have anything to do with Sam Perkins," said Mr. Newton.

"Is that his name?" inquired Larry. Then he looked at the card the man had given him, and read on it: "Samuel Perkins, representing the Universal Real Estate Co. Main Office, 1144 Broadway, New York. Loans and Commissions."

"That's who he is," replied Mr. Newton. "What was his game this time?"

"That's just what I was trying to puzzle out," was Larry's answer, as he related what the man had said.

Mr. Newton listened carefully. He nodded his head several times.

"That's it, I'll bet a cookie. When you go home ask your mother just what Perkins said, and let me know."

"Why, do you think there is something wrong in his offer?"

"I can't tell. I have my suspicions, but I'll not speak of them until I know more. Tell me what your mother says. In the meanwhile, if Perkins comes to you again, which I don't think he will, since he has seen me speaking to you, just put him off until you can communicate with me."

"Do you know him?"

"Know him? I guess yes!" replied Mr. Newton. "He was mixed up in more than one boodle and land scandal with the aldermen, but we never could get enough evidence to convict him. Maybe we can this time, if he's up to any of his tricks. Don't forget to ask your mother all about his visit."

"I'll remember," replied Larry. Then, as the City Hall was about to close for the day, they went back to the office.

CHAPTER VIII

THE AGENT'S PROPOSITION

THAT night Larry questioned his mother closely about the visit Mr. Perkins said he had paid her.

"I didn't know his name," said Mrs. Dexter, in telling her story. "He came to the door, and asked if you were my son. Then he said a reporter's life was a hard one, and asked me if I didn't think you had better get a position somewhere else. I thought he was a friend of yours, and when he said he could give you a good job in the real estate office I thought it would be a good thing, and said so."

"Is that all, mother?"

"Well, pretty nearly. He did ask a few questions about your father."

"What did he want to know?"

"Well, he wanted to know where we came from, where we used to live, and whether your father ever owned any land here in New York."

"What did you tell him?"

"I said I didn't know much about it, but that I thought your father had some papers, a deed or something, to some property in the Bronx."

"What did he say to that?"

"He didn't say much, only he appeared to be interested. He wanted to see the deed, but I couldn't find it. I remember we had it one night, and I told him I thought we burned it up. Didn't we destroy it, Larry?"

"We were going to, but, don't you remember, I said it might be a good thing to save?" said Larry. "I have it put away."

"I wish I had known it," went on Mrs. Dexter. "I would have shown it to the man. He seemed very much interested in you, Larry."

"Altogether too much," went on Larry. "Mother, don't trust that man. Mr. Newton knows him, and says he is almost as bad a criminal as though he had been convicted."

"Why, I'm sure he seemed real polite," said Mrs. Dexter. "He was very nicely spoken."

"Those are the worst kind," said Larry. "Don't ever show him any of father's old papers, particularly the deed to the land in the Bronx."

"Why not, Larry? Is there any chance of that land ever becoming valuable? I remember your poor father saying it would never be any good. He was always sure he would never get any money out of it, as it is in the middle of a swamp. Do you think it will make us rich, Larry?"

"Hardly that, mother. In fact, it may never amount to anything. I doubt if we have even a good claim to it, as I don't believe the taxes have been paid for a number of years."

"Then what good is it to keep the deed? Don't land go to the city if you don't pay taxes?"

"Sometimes. In fact, I guess it always does. But there is some mystery about this, mother. I don't know what it is, but I am going to find out."

"Oh, I hope there is nothing wrong about us having the deed, Larry. I'm sure if your poor father knew there was anything wrong about it, he would never have taken the land."

"There is not likely to be anything wrong, as far as we are concerned," said Larry. "But, from two or three things that have happened lately, I am sure there is a mystery connected with that land. In some way we are involved, because we hold the deed. I am going to tell Mr. Newton all about it, and perhaps he can help us straighten it out."

"Wouldn't it be fine if the land turned out to be a gold mine," put in Jimmy, who was listening with wide-opened eyes to what his mother and brother were talking of, and only dimly comprehending it.

"An' diamonds and ice cream mines," put in Mary, who was staying up past her bedtime.

"It would be fine," said Larry. "But I think it is more likely to be a sandbank. In fact, I think the sandman has been around here lately, and has been throwing some of his dust in someone's eyes," and he caught Mary up in his arms, and kissed her.

"There's no sand in my eyes," said Jimmy, rubbing them violently, to prove the contrary.

"My, it's getting late; it's after nine o'clock!" exclaimed Mrs. Dexter. "Time you children were in bed."

"I'll undress Mary," said Lucy, laying aside her sewing.

"I'm going to undress myself," put in Jimmy, who was growing to be quite a lad.

Soon the two children were in the land of nod, and Lucy returned to the sitting-room, where her mother and brother were still talking.

"Do you really think this man had some hidden motive?" asked Lucy of her brother.

"I'm sure of it; or else why should he be so persistent? He evidently wanted to get possession of the deed."

"Why do you think he offered you such a good position?" went on Lucy.

"He probably wanted to get me into his office, and then have me give him the deed, under pretense of examining it. Once he had it I guess we would never see it again."

"Well, it's a strange affair," said Mrs. Dexter, with a sigh. "I hope it will be explained soon."

"It will, sooner or later," spoke Larry, with a confidence he hardly felt.

When Larry met Mr. Newton the next day, and told the older reporter about the conversation Perkins had had with Mrs. Dexter, Mr. Newton said:

"Things are working out the way I expected. Now, Larry, my boy, we must say nothing, and saw wood, as they say in France. If this thing pans out it will be one of the biggest deals ever undertaken. There may be something in it for your family, and there certainly will be a big story in it for the *Leader*.

"But we must keep very quiet. If it leaks out that we suspect something, or that we are on the track of the men I believe to be behind the matter, we will lose everything. So, first of all, guard that deed carefully. Next, tell your mother to hold no conversation with men who may call at the house to inquire about your father's affairs. Lastly, do no talking yourself on this subject. I will work hard to stop the game I suspect they are trying to play, but I feel I need your help."

"Do you think it involves the land my father owns, or at least the land for which we have a deed?"

"I am almost certain of it. If it is what I believe, there is much money in it."

"For whom?" asked the lad. "I hope some of it will come my way."

"Well, part of it may," rejoined Mr. Newton. "But the men back of it intend the main share for themselves and the boodle aldermen and land sharps associated with them. So be on your guard, Larry. We can't have you kidnapped again," and Mr. Newton smiled at the

recollection of the fate that once befell Larry in the early stages of his work for the *Leader*, in connection with the cab strike.

"I'll watch out," replied the young reporter.

Larry had plenty to do that day, and, having an afternoon assignment to cover—a meeting of one of the city boards—he did not reach home until rather later than usual. As he entered the apartment he heard his mother conversing with someone in the parlor, and the voice of the visitor was a strange one.

"My dear madam," the man was saying, "I assure you everything is open and above board. We are making you an exceptionally good offer for very poor land. In fact, if I had my way, the purchase would not be made."

"Then why talk of it?" asked Mrs. Dexter. "I am not anxious to sell. In fact, I know very little about the land."

"A client of mine has taken a fancy to the place," went on the man, while Larry listened, wondering who it could be. "He has authorized me to offer you two thousand dollars for the Bronx property. That is four times what it is worth, but I want to please my friend. Will you accept my offer?"

"No, she will not!" exclaimed Larry, entering the room at that moment. "Who are you, to come here making offers for land?"

"I don't know that it concerns you," replied the stranger, in no gentle tones. "What right

have you to interfere when I am talking to this lady?" He evidently took Larry for a stranger.

"This is my son," said Mrs. Dexter, for she did not like the man's manner.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said the stranger, who seemed at a loss what to say. "I did not know him. You are Larry, are you?"

"That's my name. What is your business with my mother?"

The man appeared ill at ease. He twisted about on the chair, and said:

"Did you decide to take that offer a friend of mine in the real estate business made? I called to see if you had, and I was talking to your mother about it. Incidentally I mentioned that I could sell some property I hear she owns up in the Bronx. It is a small matter, hardly worth my while to bother with."

"Then I'd advise you not to bother with it," spoke Larry, shortly. "We can look after our own affairs, I guess."

The man's face flushed, and he seemed very angry. Then Larry remembered Mr. Newton's advice to be careful of what he did or said in connection with the land.

"Of course it's very good of you to think of my mother and myself," said Larry, a little more politely. "But we have not decided what to do about that land, and I have made up my mind to stay on the *Leader*, so you may tell your friend I cannot accept his offer."

"You had better think twice before you refuse my offer for the land," the man went on. "As I said, it is of no value, particularly, but a friend of mine wants it. I might even offer you twenty-five hundred dollars for it, but that is as high as I can go. Will you take it?"

"I think not," replied Larry, motioning to his mother to make no answer.

The reply seemed to make the man more angry than ever, and Larry could see him clench his fist, and grit his teeth.

"Would you mind letting me see the deed?" the stranger asked. "It is possible I have made a mistake, and that the land I am after is not that which you own. A glance at the deed will set me right."

"I'm sorry, but we can't let you see the deed," spoke Larry. "I have been told to take good care of it, and not to let strangers have it."

"But I only want to glance at it," said the man.

"I can't let you see it," said the lad.

"You'll be sorry for this," the man exclaimed. "In less than a month you'll be glad to take five dollars for the place, that is, provided you own it, which I very much doubt. You'll lose the land, and then you'll wish you had taken my offer."

"I can't help that," said Larry, firmly. "We will not show you the deed, nor sell you the land at present."

"Then you can take the consequences," snapped the man, as he went out.

CHAPTER IX

THE BIG SAFE-ROBBERY

"OH, Larry," said Mrs. Dexter, when the sound of the stranger's footsteps had died out down the hallway, "maybe we should have taken his offer. Twenty-five hundred dollars is a lot of money, and we are quite poor."

"I know it, mother," spoke the lad. "But I think there is something back of all this, or why should those men be making so many efforts to get possession of this land?"

"Maybe they want it for a special purpose, Larry."

"I suppose they do, but they are not offering what it is worth."

"Why, you know your father used to say it was worth very little," said Mrs. Dexter.

"I know he did, mother, but the land may have increased in value since he had it. It must have, or those men would not come to us and make an offer. If land is poor and of no worth you have to go all around hunting for a customer, but when it is of some value customers come to you. That's what makes me think this land will prove valuable. The men would not want it if it was only ordinary swamp."

"I hope you are right," said Mrs. Dexter, with a sigh, for it was hard to think of losing a chance to get what, to her, was a large sum of money. "We may hold the property a good while, providing it is not sold for taxes, and not get anywhere near that price for it, after all."

"Of course there is a certain risk," admitted Larry, "but I think it is worth taking. Mr. Newton thinks so, and has advised me to hold on to the deed. We must put it away carefully."

"It is in that tin box where I have all your father's old papers," said Mrs. Dexter.

"I think I'll keep the box under my bed," spoke Larry. "I don't suppose a burglar would take it if he saw it, but there's no use running any chances. So I'll hide the box."

When he went to bed that night he carried the box with him, first looking to be sure the deed was in it. Then he placed the receptacle under his bed, away back, and close to the wall.

"If anyone wants to get that they'll have to climb under the bed," said Larry. "And if they do, I'm pretty sure to wake up. Then—let's see, I wonder what I would do then?"

He paused to look about him, in search of a weapon, half smiling as he did so, since he had not the faintest idea that a burglar would enter their humble apartments.

"That club will be just the thing," thought Larry, as he saw a heavy stick standing in the corner. It had been used as a clothes prop, for

the lines that were strung on the flat roof of the tenement, and Jimmy, playing Indian, had brought it into the house that day. "This is better than a revolver," thought Larry, placing it at the head of his bed.

Then he fell asleep, to dream of nothing more exciting than going fishing in the creek in his old home at Campton. He dreamed he was pulling a big fellow out, and that his pole broke, tumbling him backward upon the grass. He gave a great jump, which awakened him, and he saw the sun shining brightly in through his window.

"My! I must be late!" he exclaimed, jumping up. "I'll have to hustle."

He made a hurried breakfast, and arrived at the office a few minutes after eight o'clock, to find the place somewhat excited. A number of reporters were standing about, with copies of morning papers, but they seemed to be more interested in something else than in the journals.

"What's up?" asked Larry, of some of the younger reporters.

"Big safe-robbery in Brown's jewelry store," was the answer.

"Did they get anything?"

"We haven't heard any particulars yet," replied Mr. Newton. "I just got the tip from police headquarters. But they think a good many thousand dollars' worth of gold and diamond jewelry is missing. The safe is a wreck."

Just then Mr. Emborg came in, and Mr. Newton quickly told the city editor of the robbery.

"Jump out on it," said Mr. Emborg. "Take—let's see—take Jones with you, and Larry also. We want a good story. I'll send a photographer down to take a picture of the safe."

Larry was well pleased to be assigned to help two of the best reporters on the paper. Some of the other men seemed a little envious of Larry, but, as is usual in good newspaper offices, nothing was said, and the men went out on their assignments, as given by the city editor, without a murmur, though some details were disagreeable enough.

Larry, with the two other reporters, lost no time in boarding a car for the scene of the robbery. They found a big crowd outside the jewelry store, which was located in a part of the city where persons of society and wealth did much of their shopping. A number of policemen, as well as detectives in plain clothes, were on guard in front of the establishment.

"Come, now, you'll have to move on," one of the bluecoats cried. "Can't block the sidewalk. Move on. There's nothing to see."

"Maybe we can find a stray diamond or two," suggested someone in the crowd, whereat there was a laugh.

"If you find any diamonds," rejoined the officer, "hand 'em over to me, and I'll get the reward."

The three reporters made their way through the crowd to the front door of the store.

"Ye can't come in here at all, at all!" exclaimed a big Irish policeman, blockading their path.

"We're reporters from the *Leader*," said Mr. Newton.

"Can't help it if ye are editors from the *Tail-ender*!" the bluecoat went on, with a smile at his own wit. "Orders are I'm t' let not a sowl in at all, at all!"

"That's all right, Pat," said a sergeant of police, coming up at that juncture, and seeing how matters were. "These are not ordinary persons, you know," with a smile at Mr. Newton and the others. "They're reporters."

"Well, if ye says it's all right, it's all right," the policeman said to his superior. "Ye kin go in," he added grandly to the newspaper men, as he stepped aside.

It took but a glance to show what had happened. Burglars had blown the massive door of the safe open, by using some powerful explosive. Then with tools they had pried open the inner doors, and had taken whatever suited their fancy. Larry wondered that the explosion had not wrecked the store, in the center of which the safe stood. He spoke of this to Mr. Newton.

"Those fellows used just enough explosive to crack the door, but not enough to do any damage outside," said the older reporter.

Mr. Newton, who was in general charge of

getting the story, soon made his plans. A few questions he put to one of the members of the firm who was on hand, showed him how the affair had occurred. The burglars had entered by forcing a rear window. They had placed a screen up in front of the safe, so that when the policeman on the beat looked in through the front door, as he frequently did during his rounds, he could not see the thieves at work.

"Have you a night watchman?" asked Mr. Newton of the firm member, Robert Jamison.

"Yes, and that's the queer part of it. He claims he was chloroformed by the thieves early in the evening, or at least by one of them. We sent him home, as he is quite ill from the effects of the drug."

"That's a good part of the story," said Mr. Newton. "Jones, you go down to the watchman's house, and get all the particulars you can. Larry will stay here, and help me."

When Jones had gone Mr. Newton made a close survey of the premises. He made a rough sort of diagram of how the thieves must have entered, and how they probably escaped. Then he told Larry to get a list of the diamonds and jewelry that had been stolen. Mr. Newton in the meantime had several talks with the police officers about the matter.

By this time quite a number of reporters from other papers had arrived, and, with the bluecoats and detectives, the store was pretty well filled.

Mr. Jamison, with the assistance of one of his partners, made up a list of the stolen things, and then had his typewriter make several copies, which were distributed among the reporters, Larry getting one.

Larry could not help but think this was a rather up-to-date method of reporting, where the man who was robbed went to so much trouble for the reporters.

"He's glad to do it," said Mr. Newton. "You see, the thieves will try to pawn their booty, and by publishing a list of it, pawnbrokers will be on the lookout. It's as much to his interest as it is to ours."

After getting all the facts possible, Mr. Newton and Larry waited until Jones came back from the watchman's house.

"Did you see him?" asked Mr. Newton, when Jones returned.

"Yes, and I got a good story."

"Well, keep quiet about it. Maybe none of the others will think of sending down, and we'll beat 'em."

It appeared from the story the watchman told Jones, that, early in the evening, a well-dressed man had approached the guardian, whose name was Henderson, and started a conversation with him.

They talked for some time, and finally the stranger gave Henderson a cigar. The watchman said he preferred a pipe, and asked the

stranger to wait until it could be brought from a rear room where the watchman kept it.

"Henderson went back to get it," said Jones, in telling the story, "and the stranger followed him. The watchman was about to object, saying no one was allowed in the place after dark. But the stranger was so pleasant that the watchman was not suspicious. He followed Henderson into a sort of office in the rear, and there, while Henderson was getting his pipe, the stranger suddenly attacked him.

"He held a cloth with chloroform on, to his nose, and, though the watchman struggled and tried to cry out an alarm, the robber was too much for him. Henderson was soon left unconscious, and he thinks he must have been drugged, for he did not recover his senses for several hours. That's all he knows. When he came to, the safe was blown open, and it was nearly morning."

"That slick stranger, after drugging Henderson, probably stayed in the store," said Mr. Newton, "and when the time came he admitted his confederates. After that it was an easy job for the professionals."

"Well, I guess we've got everything," continued Mr. Newton, as he prepared to go. "It will make a good story."

The three *Leader* reporters had been standing near the rear window whence the robbers gained an entrance after their companion had, from within, forced the bars outward.

"What's this?" asked Larry, stooping over, and picking up a small piece of paper. It had some peculiar blue marks on it.

"Looks as though someone had stuck their fingers in a bottle of ink, and then placed them on this paper," said Jones.

"Let me see it," asked Mr. Newton.

Larry handed it over. Mr. Newton took a long look. Then he smelled the paper.

"Whew!" he whistled softly. "This may give us an important clew to the burglars!"

CHAPTER X

WORKING UP THE CLEW

MR. NEWTON placed the paper in his pocket. Then, as there seemed to be no further news of the robbery to get at the jewelry store, the three reporters hurried back to the *Leader* office.

There, after Larry and Jones had written out their parts of the story, they turned them over to Mr. Newton, who was to arrange the whole article in proper shape. Larry, soon after this, was sent out on another assignment, and did not get a chance to see Mr. Newton until late that afternoon.

"What are you going to do to-night, Larry?" asked his friend, as they were about to leave for home.

"Nothing special, Mr. Newton. I don't do any studying during the summer nights, though I guess I need it."

"No, all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," responded Mr. Newton, with a smile. "Study is a good thing, but you need recreation also. Do you want to make a call with me?"

"I guess so. Where is it?"

"To a chemist's."

"What's up?" asked Larry.

"Well, don't say anything about it," went on Mr. Newton, in a low tone, "but we may be able to work up a clew in that burglary story."

"You mean that safe robbery we were up to this morning?"

"That's the one. I think the paper you found may prove of value. But I want to be sure of my ground before I go any further. So if you will come to the chemist's with me to-night we'll see what may develop."

Larry didn't see how a scrap of paper with a few blue finger-marks on it was going to be much of a clew to discover safe-blowers by, but he said nothing.

It was arranged that he was to call at Mr. Newton's house after supper. He found the older reporter waiting for him, and they took a car.

"Of course, I needn't tell you to keep quiet about this," said Mr. Newton. "I haven't said anything, even to Mr. Emberg, about it, for fear I might be mistaken, and get laughed at for my pains."

"I'll not say anything," promised Larry.

In a short while they found themselves at the office of the chemist. The place was shut up, but Mr. Newton seemed to know where the scientist lived, for he rang a bell a few houses off, and, when a girl answered the door, asked:

"Is Mr. Hosfer in?"

"He is, but he's very busy."

"Just tell him Mr. Newton wants to see him,"

said Larry, and the girl, with an air as much as to say that her errand would be fruitless, hurried off, leaving the two reporters standing on the steps.

"Not very polite," said Mr. Newton, as they waited.

The girl was soon back.

"Mr. Hosfer will see you," she said, with a very different air. "You must excuse me, but you see there are so many thieves about."

"I assure you we're not thieves," said Mr. Newton. "The umbrellas and hats in the hall were perfectly safe."

The girl laughed, and Mr. Newton joined in. In the midst of the merriment Mr. Hosfer, who was an old gentleman wearing iron-bowed spectacles that seemed lost under his shaggy eyebrows, shuffled into the room.

"Ah, it is my old friend of the newspaper," he exclaimed. "What terrible scandal have you been writing up now? What horrible murder, what soul-racking suicide, what terrible mystery, what awful, terrible, horrible, monstrous, impossible tale have you been concocting, my dear friend?" And he laughed as though it was the most delightful thing in the world to have sensations of the most pronounced kind served up for breakfast, dinner, and supper.

"Nothing at all, Mr. Hosfer," replied Mr. Newton. "We have nothing only the most ordinary news to-day."

"Tut! tut! Nonsense! I know better," was the reply. "I know you would not be satisfied with that. You will take a story of a little child getting lost, and make a fearful, blood-curdling mystery of it."

For it was Mr. Hosfer's opinion that all reporters were of the sensational class, who loved to dress simple facts up in word-garments of red and green ink. He could not seem to get over the notion, and perhaps it was because he seldom read a paper, being too busy with his many experiments.

"Well, what can I do for you?" asked the chemist, rubbing his hands. "Have you a sample of blood for me to analyze, or a dead body you want me to boil up in a test-tube? Trot it out," and he smiled.

"I don't know whether you will be able to help us or not," said Mr. Newton, who had known the chemist for a long time, and who had frequently come to him for information concerning stories where chemistry played a part.

"I'll do my best, but I can't guarantee to solve impossibilities. I can't tell what you had for breakfast by looking at your hat, as some reporters think a detective can. Besides, I'm not a detective."

"This is strictly in your line," said Mr. Newton, pulling the piece of paper with blue marks on it from his pocket, and holding it out to the chemist. "What is that?"

The chemist looked at it without touching it. He bent over closer, and applied his nose to it.

"It will not bite you," said Mr. Newton.

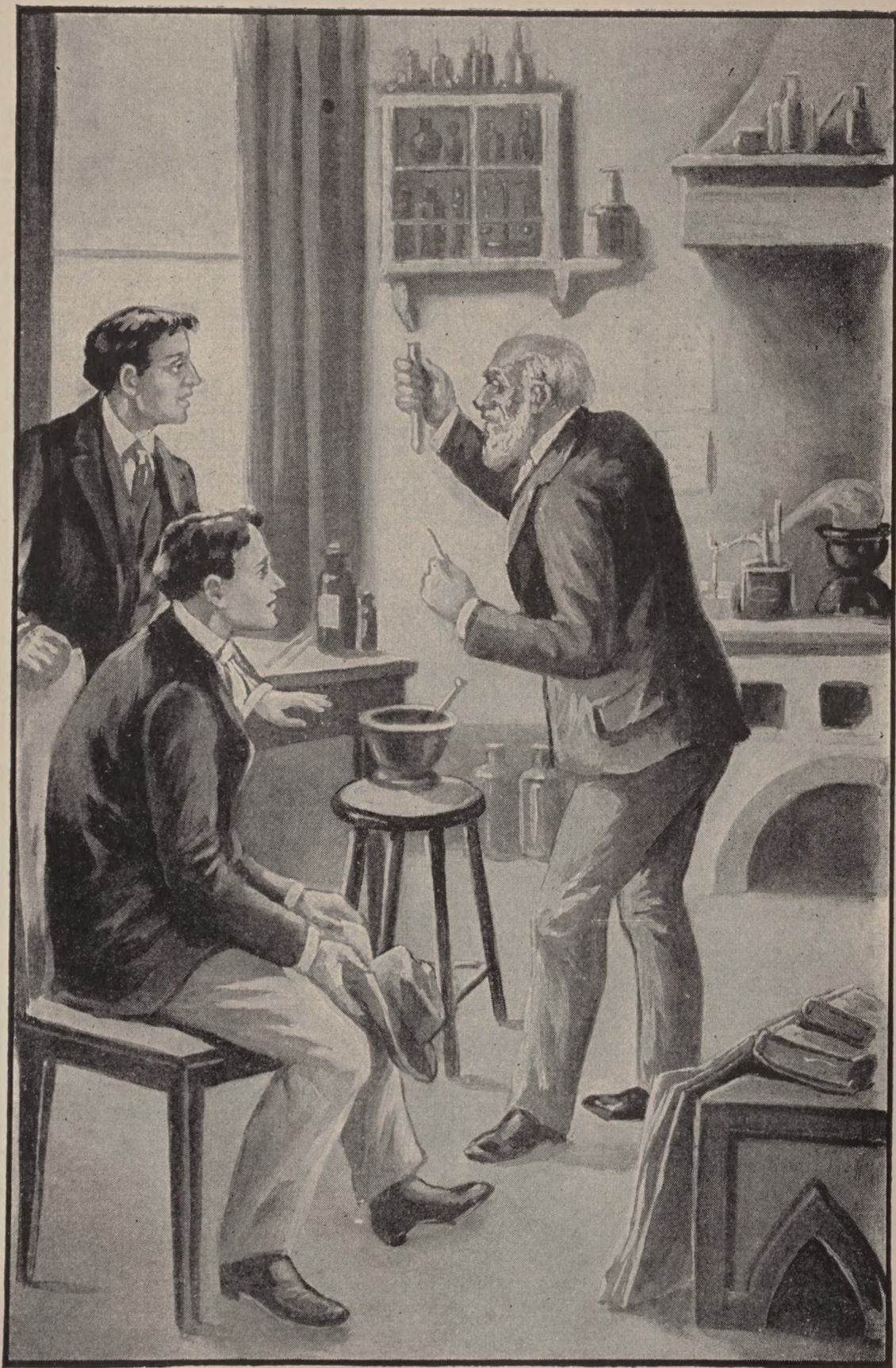
"I know it will not," was the answer. "But I want to get every impression I can from it before I take it into my hands. After I have handled it I cannot detect the odor as plainly, providing there is an odor, as there happens to be in this case. Now, what do you want me to do?" and he took the blue-marked paper from Mr. Newton's fingers.

"What made those marks?" asked the reporter.

"There you go!" exclaimed Mr. Hosfer. "You think I'm a regular Sherlock Holmes. I can't tell what made 'em at a moment's glance. I doubt if even Sherlock Holmes could. I might make a guess, and hit it, or I might not. Probably not. I could say they were ink, or from a typewriter ribbon, or from bluing that was used at the weekly wash, or from water colors, or from oil colors, or—or some chemical. I'm inclined to think they're some chemical, but, of course, it's only a guess. You see, I only have one chance among a good many certainties of guessing. I must make an analysis."

"That's exactly what we want you to do," said Mr. Newton. "Can you do it now?"

"Oh, I s'pose I can," was the answer. "I can neglect all my other work to do something that will turn out to be a terrible murder, a mysterious shooting, a horrible suicide, a forgery, a



"WE ARE COMING ON, WE SHALL BE THERE PRESENTLY."

Larry Dexter, Reporter

child-stealing, an attempt at arson, or something worse. I can do it, I s'pose, to please you, but——”

“You will do it,” said Mr. Newton, with a laugh. “I know you’re as anxious to know what made those blue spots as I am. You’re going to find out, too.”

“Yes, I am,” said Mr. Hosfer, suddenly. “I wouldn’t do it for anyone else, but you’ve done me a number of favors, Mr. Newton, and I’d like to oblige you. Come into the laboratory.”

Followed by Larry, Mr. Newton accompanied Mr. Hosfer. The laboratory was in the rear of the house. It was a place well filled with all sorts of queer apparatus. There were rows of bottles containing oddly-colored liquids and solids, big flasks, small furnaces, pipes, odd machines, scales, an electrical apparatus, test tubes, alembics, retorts, crucibles, and all that goes to make up a chemist’s workshop.

“Now after I start to work,” said Mr. Hosfer, “I don’t want either of you to ask me a question. It bothers me, and I can’t think. When I get through you may talk all you please.”

Without more ado he started in. He tore off a small piece of the paper, and put it to soak in a tube which contained some liquid. Another piece he placed in another tube. One piece he burned, and saved the ashes from it on a tiny dish. Still another piece he covered with some white substance. All the while he kept muttering

to himself, like some old philosopher in search of the secret of transmuting base metals into gold.

After a little while he took up the tube in which he had placed the piece of blue paper. He poured into it a few drops of some liquid, and the stuff in the tube changed color.

"Ah, I thought so," muttered Mr. Hosfer.

He rapidly made a number of other experiments, going through similar performances. He tested the ashes of the paper he had burned, and even applied a small portion of them to his tongue, making a wry face as he did so.

"We are coming on," he murmured, nodding his head at Mr. Newton and Larry. "We shall be there presently."

Mindful of the injunction neither of the reporters spoke. They watched Mr. Hosfer with interest.

Finally the experiments were over. The chemist holding a test tube, in which was some violet-colored liquid, came toward them.

"Are you ready to hear what I have to say?"

"Say on," spoke Mr. Newton, in half tragic tones.

"Whatever else that paper may have had on it, and I have not gone far enough to say all the things that were on it, that paper contained nitric acid in some form."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Mr. Newton.

"Positively," replied Mr. Hosfer.

Larry felt greatly disappointed. He had ex-

pected something that would point a clew to the burglars, and to learn that the paper had only been marked by an acid, was somewhat of a shock.

"Could nitric acid, such as is used in the explosive nitro-glycerine, produce that color?" was Mr. Newton's next question.

"Of course it could," said Mr. Hosfer. "I knew you were coming to some terrible explosion, some awful blowing up of innocent persons, some catastrophe, some horrible cataclysm, some terrific disturbance of the laws of nature!"

"Not quite as bad as that," said Mr. Newton. "But tell me this: If nitric acid made those marks, and nitro-glycerine could do it, would a person handling the explosive be likely to mark a paper in that fashion?"

"Most decidedly so," said Mr. Hosfer. "I can refer you to——"

"Never mind!" interrupted Mr. Newton. "That is all I want to know."

"What are you going to do now?" asked the chemist.

"I am going to look for the man who made those marks on the paper," replied the reporter.

"How can you find him?" asked Larry, in surprise.

"By looking for a man with a blue hand," was Mr. Newton's answer.

CHAPTER XI

A SEARCH FOR THE BLUE HAND

"WHAT do you mean?" asked Mr. Hosfer, as he watched Mr. Newton place what was left of the blue paper in his pocket.

"I mean that I have a clew to the persons who blew open the safe," said Mr. Newton. "As soon as I saw that paper which Larry found, with the blue marks on it, I thought it might have been used by the burglars. I was at a loss to know what could have caused the marks, but you, Mr. Hosfer, have solved that problem for me. I think I can manage the rest."

"But can't the blue marks wash off?" asked Larry. "What good is the clew then?"

"No! The blue marks will not come off!" exclaimed Mr. Newton. "Will they, Mr. Hosfer?"

"Not for some time," replied the chemist. "I see now what Mr. Newton is driving at. He is going to solve a horrible, a dastardly, soul-curdling, bloody mystery. The blue marks will not come off. It is a peculiar feature of certain forms of nitric acid, and also of nitro-glycerine, which is made from the acid, that they will stain the skin a bluish color. This color will not come off until the skin wears off, and, as that takes

some time, you may be sure that your blue-handed man will have to go around for a number of weeks with the marks on his fingers and thumb. I see what Mr. Newton is up to now. Oh, but you're a sly dog!"

"It's mostly a matter of luck," replied the reporter. "You have been of great service to us, Mr. Hosfer."

"To think I should be mixed up in a terrible, fearful, awful, shocking, sensational affair like this," spoke the chemist, with a smile, as though it was the best fun in the world. "That comes of having a reporter for a friend."

"Well," said Mr. Newton, "you ought to be glad of a chance to aid the ends of justice by discovering the safe-robber."

"All I ask is to be let alone with my experiments," said Mr. Hosfer. "At the same time, if Justice thinks I'm entitled to anything, I might say I have my living to earn, and it's none too easy a task."

"I'll speak to Justice about it," said Mr. Newton, with a laugh.

Mr. Newton and Larry now took their leave. They had found out what they wanted to know, or at least Mr. Newton had, for Larry had no suspicion of the object of the visit to the chemist's.

"What are you going to do next?" asked the lad of Mr. Newton.

"I'm going to begin a search for the blue-

handed man," was the answer. "I want you to help me. This will be aside from our regular work on the *Leader*, though if we are successful, it will mean that we'll get a good story for the paper. We may have to work nights, and at other times when we're not busy in the office or on assignments. Do you want to go in for it?"

"Of course I do," replied Larry.

"There's no reward offered, as far as I know," went on Mr. Newton. "The firm is insured in a burglary concern, I understand, so they are not worrying about the loss. But it would be a fine thing if you and I could trace the thieves by reason of this piece of blue-marked paper."

"It certainly would," rejoined Larry. "I'll do my best."

The next day Mr. Newton had a talk with Mr. Emberg on the matter. He explained about the blue-marked paper, and told how Larry had found it, and how it might form a clew to the identity of the burglars.

Mr. Newton told how he and Larry had formed a plan of hunting for the blue-handed man, and secured permission to leave the office early afternoons, with Larry, on the trail of the safe-blowers.

For several days, however, there was so much to do around the office or out on assignments, that neither Larry nor Mr. Newton had a chance to work on their quest. They did not forget it, however. One afternoon Larry found a note on

his desk asking him to call at Mr. Newton's house that night, as the older reporter had to go out on a late story.

When Larry reached his friend's house, he found that Mr. Newton had just come in.

"You almost beat me, Larry," said Mr. Newton, pleasantly. "But I'll be ready for you in a few minutes, as soon as I have a bite to eat. I'm rather hungry."

"Is it about the blue-handed man?" asked Larry.

"That's what it's about," was the reply. "That is, not exactly him, but we're going to get on his trail, and, perhaps, we can land some of his confederates."

A little later Mr. Newton explained his plan. It was that he and Larry would take every chance they had of going about in the slums of New York, for there it was that they might most naturally expect to find the man they sought.

"I don't believe any of the gang of safe-blowers has left New York," said Mr. Newton. "I have talked with the detectives about the matter, and they are sure that the criminals are hiding here. The trouble is, New York is such a big place it makes an excellent place to hide. The detectives have been over every clew, but they have succeeded very poorly so far. There's not a trace of the men or the missing valuables."

"Wouldn't it be a joke if we got 'em!" said Larry.

"Almost too good a joke to be true," was Mr. Newton's reply.

The two reporters laid their plans, and put them into operation the next day. All the time they could spare from their office work they used in tramping about the worst parts of New York. Mr. Newton "knew the ropes" from having been on frequent assignments to localities where happenings grave and gay had occurred.

Together they went through the Bowery, into Chinatown, with its Joss houses, heavy with the smell of incense sticks, into Chinese dwellings where the reek of opium lingered, and into dives of all sorts.

All the while they sought but one man, a man who had blue hands, or blue marks on his fingers and thumbs. They were not interested in faces or clothes. All they looked at was hands.

For two weeks they kept up this tiresome work. They had any number of strange experiences. Once they came near to being caught in a raid the police made on a certain place, where, it was said, Chinese gambling was carried on. Again they were in places where fierce fights started, and where the first thing that happened was that the lights went out. But each time they came through all right.

All this while, however, their quest seemed to be fruitless. They could not find the man they sought. They made guarded inquiries, for they did not want it known what their object was, in

frequenting the slums. But they did not meet with any success.

Once, indeed, they thought they were on the right track. A woman, of whom they inquired if she had ever seen a man with blue marks on his hands, replied:

"Yes, sure. He lif by me!"

"He lives with you!" exclaimed Larry, thinking, perhaps, he had stumbled upon the wife of the man they sought.

"I means in de same houses," explained the woman, who was German. "His hands is as blue like de skies. He iss de man vat you vant. His hands is blue as vat nefer vas. He vorks in a place where dey makes bluing for clothes. Ah! sure his hands iss blue, but he iss a goot man!"

"I'm afraid he's not the man we are after," said Mr. Newton. "The hands of the man we want are not blue all over, only part blue; a little blue."

"Ah, den, I knows," said the woman, with a smile.

"What do you mean?"

"It iss his liddles boy vat you vants. His hands is littler as his fader's, and dey iss not blue all over; only part blue. Ah, yes, I knows!"

Thanking the woman for her information, which, however, was of no value, Mr. Newton and Larry gave up their quest in that direction.

"We'll have to start on a fresh trail in the morning," said Mr. Newton, when he and Larry

were eating a modest lunch in a cheap restaurant about twelve o'clock that night.

"It doesn't seem as if we were going to succeed," spoke Larry. "We've been at it a good while, and haven't accomplished anything."

"Don't give up so easily," counseled Mr. Newton. "I've been on the trail of stories for several months before I landed 'em. This business isn't done in a day."

The restaurant was almost deserted. At a table in the rear three men sat eating. Larry and Mr. Newton had paid no attention to them. As the men got up to go out they went close by the table where the two reporters sat. As they went by one of them said:

"I suppose Noddy will be helping us again soon."

To this one of the other men made this rather strange reply:

"Not until he can take his gloves off. You know, he's all blue from that last affair!"

"Hush!" cautioned the third man, with a glance at the table where the two reporters were sitting, but who could not be seen very clearly, as their chairs were in a shadow.

"Did you hear what he said?" asked Larry, when the men had gone out.

"I did," replied Mr. Newton, with some show of eagerness. "It may have referred to our man, and again, and more likely, it may not. I wonder who those men were?"

"I know who one was," said Larry.

"Who?" exclaimed Mr. Newton.

"I don't know his name," spoke the lad, "but he's the same man who called on my mother that second time to ask her to sell him the Bronx property."

"Are you sure?" asked Mr. Newton, half rising from his seat.

"Very sure."

"Then I think we are on the trail," said Mr. Newton.

"Why?"

"Because that man is a sort of lawyer who stands in with criminals of all kinds. He defends them when it is necessary, and helps them out of trouble. Of course, it may be only a coincidence, but I'm almost certain now, that he knows something of the blue-handed man we are seeking. Now we begin to see a little ray of light. We have been working in the dark up to now. I know where to start."

"Can we do any more to-night?" asked Larry.

"I think not. You'd better go home and go to bed. In the morning I'll commence in another direction. I have a friend, a detective, who will help us."

So Larry started home. He would have gone much faster than he did, had he known what strange news awaited him.

CHAPTER XII

LARRY MEETS HIS OLD ENEMY

WHEN Larry was walking along a street that led to the thoroughfare on which he lived, he was suddenly brought to a halt in front of a brilliantly-lighted cigar store, by hearing someone exclaim:

"Well, if there isn't my old friend, Larry Dexter! How are you, Larry? Still on the *Leader*?"

Larry turned, to behold Peter Manton, a former copy boy on the newspaper, a lad with whom Larry had had numerous fallings out, and once quite a fight. He had not seen Peter often since the memorable race to get first to the telegraph office with news of the big flood.

"How do you do?" asked Larry, not very cordially, for he felt that Peter was an enemy.

"I'm fine," replied Peter. "What's your hurry? Wait, and I'll buy you a cigarette."

"I don't smoke cigarettes," rejoined Larry, not caring to announce that, as yet, he did not smoke at all.

"Well, don't get mad," said Peter, good-naturedly. "I suppose you have a grudge against me?"

"Well," replied Larry, frankly, "I think you acted pretty mean when you smashed my boat."

"I guess I did," admitted Peter. "But you must remember I was very anxious to get my copy on the wire first."

"So was I," added Larry, "and I beat you," and he could not help smiling at the recollection.

"And you got me fired by it," spoke Peter, with an injured air.

"How was that?" asked Larry, for though he had seen Peter since the episode, he had not had a chance to talk to him.

"When the people on the *Scorcher* found out I was responsible for your paper beating them they told me to look for another position. I didn't have much trouble finding one, though."

"Where are you now?" asked Larry, thinking it would be no more than common politeness to ask. He was anxious to get home, however, and not very much interested in Peter or his projects.

"Oh, I'm with the Universal Real Estate Company," said Peter. "I have a swell job. Mr. Perkins is a great friend of mine."

Larry started. He recollected that it was the same company and the same man who had approached him, and who had seemed so anxious about the deed to the Bronx property. He decided he would not be in such a hurry to go home, but would make further inquiries from Peter. It might lead to something, he thought.

"I wonder you don't give up the newspaper business," went on Peter. "It's hard work and poor pay. Maybe I could get you into our firm," and he spoke as though he was the senior partner.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Larry, as if he was thinking of the matter. "I have very little knowledge of real estate."

"You don't have to have," spoke Peter. "You could get along all right. All you have to do is to go around and see people, get descriptions of property, and keep a few books. It's heaps easier than chasing copy."

"I'm not chasing copy any more," replied Larry. "I'm a regular reporter."

"That's worse," went on Peter. "You never know when you're through working. Now I finish by three o'clock every day, and have the rest of the time to myself."

"Does your firm do much business?" asked Larry.

"You bet. And say, it's going to do more. If you came in with us now I could put you on to a good thing. There's going to be a big raise in land values in a certain locality in a little while, and our firm's going to make a lot of money."

"Where is the land?" asked Larry, carelessly.

"Don't you wish you knew?" sneered Peter. "I'm not telling everyone. But, if you like, I'll speak to Mr. Perkins for you."

"You might," said Larry, thinking it would be

no harm to get as much information as possible. "I'd like to make some money."

During this time the two youths had been standing in front of the cigar store. Larry was thinking it was about time for him to move on, as he did not want to arouse Peter's suspicions by too many questions, when a short, stout, and dark-complexioned man came hurrying around the corner.

"I was afraid you'd gone," the man said to Peter.

"No, I was talking with a friend of mine," replied the former copy boy on the *Leader*. "Are you through?"

"Yes," replied the man. "But I had no success."

Larry looked idly at the stranger. He noticed he wore gloves, and this, at first glance, struck him as peculiar, for the night was warm. Still this fact was not so surprising, and Larry's mind was about to pass over the incident when his eye happened to catch a glimpse of something blue about the man's hand.

At first he thought it was the edge of a blue cuff. He looked again, more closely, and was startled to see that part of the glove was turned back at the wrist, and that the flesh which showed was deep blue in color.

Larry was so startled by the sight, so alarmed at the unexpected appearance of the blue mark, bringing as it did to his mind a recollection of

the safe robbery, that he was afraid the man might notice his surprise. But Peter's acquaintance did not pay any attention to Larry. He seemed in a hurry, and anxious to be moving on.

Larry began to wish that there might be some excuse for remaining longer in the company of Peter and the man. Yet he was afraid that if he did so, the stranger might suspect something, and hurry away before Larry had a chance to communicate with Mr. Newton.

In order to be sure of the person when he saw him again Larry looked closely at him. He saw that he had piercing black eyes, a nervous manner, a small, black mustache which he pulled at from time to time, and there was a small scar under his left eye.

"I'll know him if I ever see him again," thought Larry.

The man seemed ill at ease. Suddenly he discovered that the edge of his glove was turned back. With a quick motion he buttoned the article up.

As he did so he glanced sharply at Larry, as if anxious to know whether the lad had noticed anything. Larry pretended that his shoelace needed tying, and stooped over to avoid meeting the fellow's look. As Larry straightened up he heard the stranger call out:

"Come on, Peter. There's our car," and, before Larry could have stopped them, had he de-

sired to, or thought it wise, they were running after it.

"Well, that's finding a man and losing him in a hurry," thought Larry. "I wonder what I'd better do?"

At first he thought of calling on Mr. Newton. But as the reporter lived quite a distance away Larry decided this would not be wise. Then he thought he would call his friend up on the telephone. But the idea of talking about the blue-handed man over the wire, where anyone might hear it, did not seem to be exactly right.

"I'll wait until morning," thought Larry. "We can't do anything now. Besides we're on the right trail. I know where to find Peter, and maybe I can get some information out of him."

With this end in view Larry proceeded on his way home. It was getting close to midnight, and he was a little worried lest his mother be alarmed over his long absence. He found her waiting for him.

"Oh, Larry!" she exclaimed. "You have given me such a fright!"

"Why, mother, what's the matter?"

"Oh, I thought perhaps those men had done you some harm."

"What men?"

"Why, the ones who are trying to get the deed away from us."

"Have they been bothering you again?"

"Yes. One was here a while ago."

"Was it anyone that had been here before?" he asked.

"No, this was a different one. He came in about nine o'clock when the children were in bed, and Lucy and I sitting here. He seemed nice at first, and then he began to ask me about the deed. He said you had sent him."

"Me, mother? I never sent anyone."

"Well, that's what he said. He wanted me to sign an agreement to sell the property."

"I hope you didn't sign, mother."

"No, I didn't, Larry, and when I refused the man was very angry. He tried to hide his feelings, but I could see he was mad. Then he wanted to look at the deed, but I remembered what you had said, and I would not show it to him. Pretty soon he went away, but I was very much frightened."

"What sort of a looking man was he?"

"Rather short, and dark-complexioned. He had a little black mustache which he kept pulling at all the time, and there was a scar under his left eye."

Larry started as he heard these details. He began to see who the man was.

"Did you notice anything else about him, mother?"

"Nothing special, except that he kept his gloves on all the while he was here."

"Are you sure of that, mother?"

"Of course, Larry. I spoke of it to Lucy af-

terward. I even asked him to take them off, as it was rather warm."

"What did he say?"

"He seemed quite excited, and buttoned up one that had come open."

"Did you notice anything else?"

"No, I didn't, but Lucy did. She spoke to me about it afterward. She said she caught a glimpse of the man's wrist where the glove was turned back, and it seemed to be of a red color."

"A red color!" exclaimed Larry.

"I mean blue," went on Mrs. Dexter. "She said it looked as if the man worked in a bluing factory. Perhaps that is why he kept his gloves on. He did not want people to see his blue hands."

"I guess that's the reason," said Larry, trying to speak calmly. But he was greatly excited. The plot, which seemed to involve him and his folks in the safe-robbing, seemed to be growing more tangled.

CHAPTER XIII

IN WHICH THE DEED IS MISSING

LARRY decided it would be better not to tell his mother anything concerning the blue-handed man, or his connection with the safe-robbery. He felt it would only make her worry, and would be of no particular good.

"I'll solve this thing myself," thought the young reporter. "I guess Mr. Newton and I can do it."

So, after a few more questions, and added injunctions to his mother never to let the deed go out of her possession, Larry went to bed.

His mother soon sought her room, and presently the household was quiet. It was now past midnight, and everyone in the tenement seemed to be asleep.

It was rather a quiet neighborhood, and persons living in it were not in the habit of staying up late. The policemen whose beats took in those streets seldom paid a visit to them, for they knew there would not, in all likelihood, be any disturbances.

It grew a little cooler as the night wore on, and people who had been kept awake by the previous hot spell were making up for their lost sleep.

If any persons in the tenement, or apartment, where Larry and his mother lived, had been awake about three o'clock that morning they might have wondered at the sight of two figures stealthily creeping up through the side alleyway that led to the rear cellar door, and the stairs leading to the back doors of the various rooms. Two dark figures there were, moving along, almost as silently as shadows.

Now and then they would stop and whisper together, but, so quiet were their voices and so silent their steps that not a person heard them.

The policeman on the beat came to the head of the street, and looked down it. He saw nothing. How could he see the two figures in the alley? The officer remarked:

"It's all quiet there. What's the use of walking down? I'll just go over to the avenue, and have a chat with Hennessy, and smoke a cigar before the roundsman comes along."

So the policeman passed away. Meanwhile the two dark figures crept on. In a little while they had reached the cellar door. Cautiously one of the men drew from his pocket a small instrument like a cold chisel or a screwdriver, except that it had no wooden handle. One edge was broad and sharp, like a wedge.

The man went close to the cellar door. He put the edge of the instrument between the door and the jamb, close to the lock. There was a little

crackling sound, hardly enough to waken the lightest sleeper.

"Is it all right?" whispered the man who had remained on guard outside the cellar door.

"All right," was the whisper in return.

"Then go ahead and start the blaze. Don't make much of a one. Put it near the dumbwaiter shaft, so the smoke will go up quickly. Use wet paper. It makes more smoke."

"Go ahead," came back, in whispered accents. "I'll do my part, if you do yours. Do you know where they keep the papers?"

"Sure. Under the bed," was the answer. "The old lady gave it away when I was talking to her to-night, only she never knew it."

Then, while one of the men made his way into the cellar, the other began creeping up the rear stairs of the apartment house. And, if one had looked closely at the man who was creeping upstairs, they would have seen that his hands were encased in gloves, though it was summer time and quite hot.

Up and up he went, step by step, trying each one, to be sure it did not creak, before he trusted his weight on it. Now and then he would stop, and peer on all sides of him. Then he would listen to catch the faintest sound. But there was no noise. Not even the step of the policeman on the beat disturbed him. From afar came the hum of the big city, the roar of cars and elevated trains, the throb of traffic in the metropolis that

never goes to sleep, but in the neighborhood of the tenement house all was quietness.

All at once the man on the steps began to sniff the air, like an animal scenting danger from afar.

"He's started the fire! I can smell the kerosene oil!" he said, softly. "Now for the final scene!"

Carefully he walked along until he came to the door that led into the kitchen of the Dexter apartments. From his pocket he drew forth a small instrument similar to that which the other man had used. He placed the sharp edge between the door and the jamb, close to the lock. He pried on it. There was a slight crack, and the door had been opened with a burglar's jimmy.

An instant later there broke out on the night air that most dreaded of all alarms in the midst of the crowded population of New York's poor:

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

That was the cry that smote on the ears of those who were suddenly awakened from their slumbers.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

How it echoed down into the yard! How it sounded into the sleeping rooms! How it penetrated down the street, and even farther to where the policeman was smoking a cigar before the roundsman came!

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

Up through the tenement poured a volume of thick smoke. Thick, stifling vapor that rolled

up through the dumbwaiter shaft, that penetrated to the rooms, and set the frightened tenants to coughing.

What a scramble there was then! What a hurrying and scurrying to leap from bed, to grasp whatever garments came nearest to hand, to wrap them about one, and then, if there were children, to grab them up, and run for the hall!

What a scene of terror succeeded what, but a few minutes before, had been a peaceful one! Frightened yells and screams mingled with the alarm of fire shouted by a loud voice. Children began to cry. Women laughed hysterically, and men called to one another to know where the blaze was, for no flames could be seen. Only there was that black and stifling smoke.

The man who had so stealthily crept up the stairs suddenly leaped into the kitchen of the Dexter home.

"Fire! Fire!" he exclaimed. "Hurry up out! The house is on fire!"

Mrs. Dexter screamed. Mary and Jimmy began to cry. Lucy slipped on a robe, and ran into her mother's room. Larry leaped from his bed, and, pausing only to pull on his trousers, ran to where the others had gathered in the hall.

"Are you all out?" shouted the man, in the darkness. "Come on. I'll carry the little boy. You take the little girl, lad. The other girl can help the old lady!"

Then grabbing up Jimmy, the man, whose

hands were encased in gloves, half led, half pushed the little group on before him. Larry, dazed from sleep, grabbed up Mary, and, seeing that Lucy was leading her mother safely down, followed; the man bringing up the rear with Jimmy, who was hardly awake.

"Is the house on fire?" asked Larry.

"Sure! Can't you smell the smoke?" asked the man.

"I mean is it bad?" cried Larry. "Because if it isn't I must go back for some of our clothes and things."

"Don't stop for that now," the man exclaimed. "You'll be all burned up! Save your lives first!"

In all the excitement of it Larry could not help wondering where he had heard that voice before. But there was little time to think of this.

Down the stairs they ran, being joined by other tenants from every floor, all of whom were fleeing in scant attire. The cries of "fire" were being called now by scores of voices.

In about a minute, though it seemed five times as long as that, Larry, his mother, and all the others had emerged on the street. They found themselves in the midst of a motley throng, but in the excitement no one seemed to mind the strangeness of the attire.

One man was carrying two pillows, while his wife had a bird cage. Another man was trying to put his trousers on for a coat, and a third was endeavoring to drag a brass bed down the stairs.

Then came a shrill tooting whistle followed by the gallop of horses.

"The engines are coming!" cried Larry. "Get back out of the way, mother. Here, Jimmy, you and Mary stay close to me. We'll go into one of these other houses. The fire doesn't seem to be bad. Then I must go back after that box of papers."

The man with the gloves, who had roused the Dexter family, had placed Jimmy down on the sidewalk.

"I'm going back to rescue some more!" he cried, as he sped up the smoke-filled hallway. He seemed anxious to save human lives even at the risk of his own.

By this time half a score of engines and trucks had drawn up in front of the tenement, summoned by the alarm the policeman had turned in.

The various apparatus had not come to a halt before dozens of firemen had leaped to the ground, and run into the house. They wasted no time. While some sprang up the stairs to rescue any persons who had been left behind, others sought the source of the blaze. They soon discovered it to be in the cellar.

Lighting the way with lanterns they carried they dashed down, not minding the choking smoke.

"Run in a chemical line!" shouted a battalion chief through a small megaphone he carried.

"It's only a pile of rubbish on fire. We don't need any water."

Quickly a small hose from the chemical engine was unreeled. The engineer turned a crank at one end of a big cylinder, and a bottle inside which contained vitriol was smashed, allowing the contents to mingle with a strong solution of soda water. This created carbonic-acid gas, and forced the mingled liquids out through the hose at high pressure.

On to the blazing pile of rubbish the chemicals were turned, and the little blaze, which was more of smoke than of fire, was soon out.

"It's all over!" cried the battalion chief, five minutes later. "You can go back to bed!"

The people began to laugh hysterically, so sudden was the relief from anxiety. Several could not believe but what the house was doomed. The firemen, however, assured them there was no danger. Through the open windows the smoke was soon blown away. The engines started back to quarters.

"Come on, mother," said Larry. "I guess we can go back now."

"Golly! Wasn't that just like a circus!" exclaimed Jimmy.

Up the stairs the Dexters went. On the way they were joined by scores of other tenants, all talking at once.

"I wonder if my papers and that deed are safe," thought Larry.

As soon as he got back to his bedroom he looked for the box. He crawled under the bed, and felt about.

"That's queer," he mused. "I'm sure it was here!"

He made a hurried search of the room. The box had disappeared.

"We've been robbed during the fire!" exclaimed Larry.

CHAPTER XIV

A STRANGE OFFER

"ROBBED!" cried Mrs. Dexter. "I hope no one has taken my gold breastpin and my ring!"

"I hope they didn't take my book of fairy stories!" came from Jimmy.

"Do you mean thieves have been in here during the fire?" asked Lucy, as she sat down on a chair in the kitchen.

"That's what I mean," replied Larry. "The box of papers, in which the deed to the Bronx land was kept, is gone."

"Perhaps you took it out with you, in your excitement," suggested Mrs. Dexter.

"No," replied Larry. "I know we have been robbed. The more I think of it the more I believe the fire was only a make-believe one, started to scare us so we would get out and give the thief a chance to work."

Mrs. Dexter could hardly credit this, but Larry insisted he was right. The firemen went through the building to make sure there were no lurking sparks, and some of them said the blaze had amounted to nothing more than a small bit of rubbish on fire in the cellar, which confirmed Larry's belief.

He said nothing more to his mother, however, as she was much excited over the fire. Soon they returned to bed, though Mary and Jimmy were the only ones who slept much afterward, as the others were too nervous.

Larry was much puzzled. That bold and daring men were plotting against the welfare of himself and his relatives he had little doubt. He was convinced that the blaze was only started for the purpose of giving someone an opportunity of getting possession of the deed.

"If they go to such lengths to get it, there must be something very valuable about it," thought Larry.

Long and earnestly he thought over the matter. He recalled the man who had rushed into their apartments to notify them of the fire, and his suspicions grew that he had heard his voice somewhere before.

"I wonder if he could be someone whom I have been to see to get a story for the paper," thought Larry.

He reviewed as well as he could the men he had called on since he had been a reporter. None of them seemed to fit.

"I know!" the lad exclaimed to himself, as he tossed on his bed in the darkness; "he's the man who came up while I was talking to Peter. He's the man who kept his gloves on when he came to see mother. He's the blue-handed man!"

Once he had established this fact to his satis-

faction, Larry's mind worked quickly. That there was some connection between the blue-handed man's operations, the safe-robbery, and the theft of the deed, Larry had no doubt.

"Things are getting into a strange mix-up," thought the young reporter. "As soon as I think I am on the track of one part of the mystery it gets all tangled up with another part. I would like to catch that blue-handed man. Then, I believe, I would have one of the safe-robbers, I might get the deed back, and learn what is behind this land matter. It might make us wealthy. I wish it would."

Finally, after much thinking over of the problems without result, Larry dropped off into a doze. When he awoke it was broad daylight, and the only thing to remind him of the night's excitement was a heavy odor of smoke in the rooms. The whole house smelled as though someone had been curing hams in it.

Larry made a hasty breakfast, for it was getting late. Before he started for the office he made a search of the rooms, hoping against hope that he might come across the box of papers. But it was nowhere to be seen. He crawled under the bed, and lighted a match.

There in the dust, close to the wall, was the mark where the box had stood. Close by was a small, dark object.

"I wonder what that is," thought Larry.

He reached for it. It was soft. Wonderingly

he carried it to the light and examined the article. It was a man's glove.

"I don't remember losing any of mine," he thought.

He looked at the glove more closely. It was too large to have ever fitted his hand. He turned it inside out. To his surprise the lining was streaked with blue, and there was a peculiar odor.

"This was worn by the blue-handed man!" whispered Larry, excitedly. "He has been here! There is no doubt now but that he took the box! I will save this for evidence in case I ever catch him!"

Larry had a number of assignments that day, taking him to various parts of the city. He had to attend a brief session of a church society, then he had to get an obituary of a well-known business man, next he had to cover a session of a subcommittee of the Board of Aldermen, and finally he was sent to see a man who offered to jump off the Brooklyn Bridge backward, provided some other person would jump with him, for a wager.

So Larry was rather tired out when afternoon came, and the *Leader* had gone to press for the last edition. He wanted a chance to tell Mr. Newton what had happened, and ask his advice.

"Now what would you do?" asked Larry, when he had finally told the older reporter about the fire.

"I wouldn't do anything," replied Mr. Newton. "That is, right away. If you go to the police,

which is the most natural thing to do, in case of a robbery, these men—for I am sure now that there is a gang of them—will know it very shortly. In some mysterious way the thieves learn what the police know almost as soon as the authorities find things out themselves.”

“What would you do then?” asked Larry.

“I’d just keep quiet,” was the answer. “The thief, or thieves, are waiting to see what you will do. If you can fool them, so much the better. They must be desperate, or they would not venture to take the deed. To make any use of it they must forge signatures, and that is a risky proceeding.

“I am beginning to see what they are up to. I heard a rumor the other day of a plan that will enormously increase real estate values up in the Bronx section. It may be that the gang is behind this. Now while they have an advantage over you in that they have the deed, there is a certain element of risk in it for them. Deeds are bad things to monkey with.”

“What do you think they’ll do?” asked Larry.

“Wait and see,” replied Mr. Newton. “I am in the dark, just as much as you are. We can only wait. It may be that they took the deed in order to gain some hold over you, to force you to do what they want, and sell them the property.”

“Do you think there is any connection between the man who was in to see my mother—the man who took the deed—and the man who was in the

safe-blowing gang?" asked Larry, anxious to know how sound his own theories were.

"I think the same man is concerned in all three transactions. The thing to do now is to catch him. If we do we can have him arrested on suspicion of the safe-robbery, and then we can work up the land matter. But wait a few days before you do anything, and if anything new turns up, let me know."

The next day Mr. Newton was sent out of town on an assignment. Larry, too, had his hands full, for several reporters were on vacations, and it meant doubling up all around. One afternoon, chancing to look over the "personal" advertisement column of the paper, he saw the following:

"BLUE.—If return of document is desired from the fire, L. had better insert personal, making arrangements to sell land. Otherwise will suffer. Address, Mr. Hand."

"That's rather odd," thought Larry. "It almost seems as if it was meant for me, and as if it was put in by the blue-handed man."

The more he looked at it the more certain he was that some one of the gang had become afraid to try and use the deed illegally, and had taken this means of frightening him and his mother into complying with the gang's wishes.

"Those words 'blue' and 'hand' are certainly

put in so that I will see them," thought Larry. "They must know we are on their track, yet they are very daring to come out so openly about it. I wonder what I had better do?"

The next day he showed the advertisement to Mr. Newton. The latter was interested at once. He made inquiries at the business office of the paper to learn who had brought the personal in. There he met with a snag, for it had been sent in by mail, with stamps inclosed sufficient to pay for one insertion. This was frequently done with small advertisements.

Mr. Newton had the letter hunted up which accompanied the advertisement, but this gave no clues, as it was typewritten, as was the advertisement itself.

"They're up to date, at any rate," the older reporter said.

"What shall we do?" asked Larry, again.

"Put an answering personal in," replied Mr. Newton. "Here, I'll write it. We'll see if we can't beat them at their own game."

He scribbled down a few words on a slip of paper, glanced over it, changed it slightly, and read:

"HAND.—L. will do as you wish. Say where and when matter can be closed and deed returned. BLUE."

"That ought to fetch them," said Mr. Newton.

"Now we'll put it in the paper, and wait for results."

They did not have a long delay. The day following the insertion of the personal by Mr. Newton, Larry received a letter. It was typewritten, and came to his house. It was short, and directed him, if he wished to get the deed back, to sign a certain agreement which was inclosed in the missive, and leave the agreement in a cigar store, the address of which, Larry noted, was the same as the one in front of which he had met Peter Manton.

As for the agreement it was a short one, in which Larry promised, in consideration of receiving certain valuable property, to convey, by a warranty deed, to certain persons to be named hereafter, a tract of land in the Bronx.

"Put the agreement in an envelope, and send it back to them," advised Mr. Newton, when he was told of the matter. "I think we can catch the scoundrels. Even if you filled out the paper I doubt if it would stand in law, but we will not take that chance. Just leave it blank, put it in an envelope, and leave it in the cigar store. Ask no questions, and leave the rest to me."

CHAPTER XV

THE SIGN OF THE BLUE HAND

"WHEN shall I do it?" asked Larry.

"Let me see," mused Mr. Newton. "I'll have to lay my plans carefully. I guess to-morrow night would be a good time. We'll write another personal, and put it in the paper to-morrow, telling the gang the document will be in the cigar store."

"Then when they come to get it we'll have a policeman on hand, and arrest whoever comes for it," said Larry. "That's the idea, isn't it?"

"Not exactly."

"I would think that was the thing to do."

"You don't know these chaps, Larry. If we arranged to have a detective on guard, ready to grab whoever claimed the paper, the gang would learn of it in some way, and they would never come near the place. We will have to be foxier than that. We'll have to do the watching ourselves, or rather I will. I believe none of the gang knows me. I'll arrange to be in the cigar store to-morrow night, and I'll follow whoever calls for the paper."

So it was arranged. The document, unsigned, was placed in the envelope which the men behind

the land plot had sent to Larry. He took it to the cigar store. The proprietor of the place kept a sort of private post-office, and had a number of boxes in which he kept mail or other things for his customers who preferred doing business that way rather than through the government agency.

Larry handed the envelope to the man. The young reporter wanted to ask who Mr. Hand was, and where he lived, but he refrained, for he thought the cigar man would probably refuse to answer, or else say he did not know.

That evening Mr. Newton stopped in the store to get a cigar. He thought the proprietor eyed him rather sharply, but Mr. Newton was used to meeting all sorts of persons in his capacity as a reporter, and did not mind being stared at. He tried to engage the proprietor in conversation, but the cigar dealer was not in a very pleasant mood, and answered shortly.

"I promised a friend I would meet him here this evening," said the reporter. "Have you any objections to me waiting in your store?"

"Well, I don't like people hanging around," was the rather ungracious answer. "This place is small, and I need all the room there is to do business."

"My friend might want to buy a box of cigars," said Mr. Newton.

"Oh, of course, if he's coming here in the way of trade," said the cigar man, "I've no objec-

tions to your waiting, but as a general thing I don't like it."

He tried to be polite, but it was hard work. He even got a chair for Mr. Newton to sit on, but all the time the cigar man seemed nervous and ill at ease. He kept watching the door, as though he expected someone to come in who would object to the reporter's presence.

An hour passed, and there was no sign of the blue-handed man or any messenger from him. Several persons called, and got letters or packages from the boxes, but the document which Larry had placed in the envelope in accordance with the instructions contained in the personal, was not disturbed.

"I wonder if they are suspicious," thought the reporter. "They may have someone on the watch, or the proprietor may have sent them word that a stranger is in the store, and advising them to be cautious. However, I'll wait a while longer."

Another hour passed, and it was getting on to eleven o'clock. Mr. Newton was about to give up his vigil as fruitless, when a youth entered, went quickly up to the box, and took out the envelope. Mr. Newton screened his face with a newspaper, but looked over the top of the sheet to see who the messenger of the mysterious gang was.

"Well, if it isn't Peter Manton, who used to be a copy boy on the *Leader*!" thought Mr. New-

ton. "Well, of all things! To think of him being mixed up with that gang!"

He was so surprised that he forgot to keep the paper up in front of his face, and lowered the sheet. After getting the letter from the box, Peter glanced over in the corner where Mr. Newton sat. He recognized the reporter at once, and seemed much startled on beholding him.

Shoving the envelope containing the blank agreement into his pocket, Peter hurried out of the store.

"I must get after him!" thought Mr. Newton. He purchased a few cigars from the storekeeper to make some compensation for his long use of the chair, and, murmuring something about his friend probably having been detained, hurried from the place after Peter.

As soon as he got outside he looked up and down the street to see in what direction the former copy boy had gone. At first he could catch no glimpse of him. There were only a few persons on the thoroughfare, however, and soon Mr. Newton's trained eyes picked out the youth hurrying along on the opposite side of the street.

"He's trying to get away," thought Mr. Newton, as he stepped out briskly. "But I'll trail him."

If Mr. Newton could have seen the figure of a short, stout man glide out from the shadow of the cigar store, as he himself left the place, and follow after him, he might not have felt so easy in his

mind about his ability to catch Peter. The man, taking after Mr. Newton, moved rapidly along, taking care to keep well in the shadows. His hat was pulled down low over his face, and on his hands were a pair of new gloves.

"You're trying a smart trick," the man muttered, as he shadowed Mr. Newton, "but I guess we're on to your game. It's a good thing I sent the boy instead of going myself."

Meanwhile the double chase continued. Peter hurried on, obeying the instructions he had received. He crossed several streets, and made his way to that part of New York known as Chinatown, in the neighborhood of Pell and Mott streets, the place of the slums and opium joints.

After him came Mr. Newton, who kept as close behind the lad as was possible without detection. After Mr. Newton came the man wearing a new pair of gloves.

"It's a good thing Larry didn't undertake this thing alone," thought Mr. Newton. "The chase is leading into a dangerous part of town. But it's just the place where I'd expect the gang to have its headquarters."

"I hope he doesn't give up until he gets where I want him to," murmured the man with the gloves. "If he doesn't we'll show him a thing or two, and I guess he'll not be so fond of monkeying with other people's affairs after this," and he smiled in a cruel sort of way that boded no good to Mr. Newton.

Peter was playing his part well. He must have known he was being followed, yet he gave no sign. If Mr. Newton had not been so intent on the chase, he might have noticed that the former copy boy was not going as fast as would have a messenger on a somewhat dangerous mission. Peter was only leading the reporter on.

The boy swung into the Bowery, which at this hour of midnight was ablaze with lights, and crowded with people. Mr. Newton had some trouble keeping the youth in sight, but by shortening the distance between himself and Peter, he managed to get glimpses of him now and again. Finally Peter turned into Pell Street. He walked on past several houses, and came to a halt in front of a Chinese store. In the windows were all sorts of queer things that the Celestials use for food.

There were vegetables like cucumbers, pickled watermelon rind, sweetened ginger root, Lichi nuts, sunflower seeds, pickled eggs, dried sharks' fins, the pith of bamboo shoots, ready for eating, bottles of rice wine, odd-shaped dishes, and many chopsticks. It was a Chinese grocery.

At the left of the main entrance was a smaller one leading up a flight of stairs. In the hallway a lamp, shaded by red paper on which were some Chinese characters, gave a faint illumination.

With a careful look about him, as if to see whether he was followed, Peter entered the hallway, and began to mount the stairs. Mr. New-

ton hesitated. He might be running into a trap if he went in. Though he knew he was in New York, and that there were police officers close at hand, he realized that often many crimes were committed in Chinatown that never reached the police.

But he wanted very much to find out what sort of a gang was behind the mysterious operations that had involved the Dexter family, and which gang also seemed to be mixed up in the safe-robbery.

"I think I'll chance it," thought Mr. Newton.

He paused a few seconds, as if to look at the things in the grocery window. Instead of observing them, however, he was carefully looking around to see if there were any suspicious characters in the neighborhood.

He did not see the man with the gloves, for that individual, as soon as he had seen the reporter stop in front of the building Peter entered, had hidden himself in a nearby doorway.

"Here goes!" exclaimed Mr. Newton to himself, as he entered the hallway.

It was quite dark, in spite of the lamp. He went up the first flight, and found himself in a narrow hall, from which several doors opened.

"I wonder which room he went into," thought the reporter. "I can't knock at all of them and ask. Few of the Chinese understand English when you want 'em to."

He decided to go to the top floor, and get an

idea of the layout of the place, before making any inquiries. So he continued up the next flight of stairs. The floor above was like the second, except that the portal of one room was open. Going past it Mr. Newton peered inside. He saw two solemn-faced Chinese playing a card game, and smoking long-stemmed pipes.

"I guess he's not in there," thought Mr. Newton. "I'll try the next floor."

Up he went, listening now and then to see if he was being followed. He could hear no footsteps, and there was good reason for it, as the man with the gloves, who had glided into the hallway a few seconds after Mr. Newton had entered, had slipped over his heavy shoes a pair of large felt slippers that made no sound.

"He's walking right into the trap!" said the man with the gloves. "We'll have him now."

Mr. Newton reached the top hall. He saw a number of doors. At the end of the corridor, in front of one portal, there burned a dim hanging-lamp.

"I'll see what's in there," the reporter mused.

He reached the door. He was about to knock when he happened to glance up.

He was startled to see confronting him, painted on a panel of the door, a large blue hand.

CHAPTER XVI

A VAIN QUEST

"I GUESS this is the place," thought the reporter. "It's rather odd, though, that they dare adopt such a sign as that openly, when they must know we are on their track in connection with the safe-robbery. I wonder if I'd better go in."

The question was answered for him, as, at that instant, the door opened. Mr. Newton saw before him a room brightly lighted. Around a table were seated four men. In front of them was the envelope which had been obtained by Peter at the cigar store. Peter was nowhere to be seen.

"Well?" inquired one of the men, a short, slim fellow.

"I was looking for a friend, a young man," said Mr. Newton, rather taken by surprise.

"Yes, we know who it was. He brought this envelope. But it's no good. You can't fool us!" exclaimed a voice behind Mr. Newton, and the next instant the reporter was shoved into the room by the man with the gloves, who entered after him, and shut the door, which closed with a snap.

At first the reporter was startled with the suddenness of it all, and he was not a little alarmed.

He knew he was alone, and in the power of the gang he had sought to run down. He was also in the worst part of the city, where cries for help might go unheeded, since there were hourly fightings among the inhabitants, to which cries the police, if they heard them, paid no attention.

Mr. Newton thought he had been a little hasty. However, he resolved to put the best face on it he could, and not to seem frightened.

"Well?" asked the short, slim man again. "Now you've seen your friend isn't here, what can we do for you?"

"You might give me back the stolen deed, for one thing," exclaimed Mr. Newton, boldly, "and your friend Noddy might explain something in connection with a certain safe-robbery, while as for Mr. Perkins, he might tell what his plans are in connection with that land grab!"

There was a sudden stir among the men, as Mr. Newton said this. Two of the men got up from their chairs, and started toward the reporter, but a gesture from the man with the gloves restrained him. The latter then said, slowly and deliberately:

"You think you know a heap about us, don't you?"

"I know more than you think I do, Noddy," said Mr. Newton, coolly.

"Well, you didn't play this trick right," sneered Noddy. "We haven't opened that envelope, but we know it doesn't contain the agreement we

want and intend to have. To prove you that, I'll tear it up without opening it."

This he did, throwing the pieces into a coal box that stood in a far corner of the apartment.

"In the next place," went on Noddy, "you've gone a little too far in following our messenger here. We expected you would do so, however, and made our plans accordingly. Now you're here you may have to stay longer than you counted on."

"I guess not," remarked Mr. Newton, speaking as lightly as he could, though he confessed afterward he felt no little alarm. "Remember, we're in New York."

"No! We're not in New York! We're in Chinatown, and that makes all the difference in the world!" exclaimed Noddy. "Get the cords, Ned!"

The tallest of the four men rose, and went to a closet. He came back quickly with a long, thin, but very stout rope under his arm.

"Fasten him up now!" commanded Noddy.

"Not without a fight!" exclaimed Mr. Newton. He backed into a corner, and stood ready to defend himself. He caught sight of an iron poker near the coal-box, and grabbed it up.

"There's going to be some broken heads if you touch me!" the reporter cried.

The four men, with Ned, holding the cords, in the lead, hung back.

"Don't be afraid of him!" yelled Noddy. "You can get the better of him!"

Mr. Newton swung the poker menacingly.

"Try it yourself, if you're so anxious to get a cracked cocoanut!" muttered one of the men to Noddy.

Noddy made a motion as if to grapple with the reporter. But Mr. Newton, with a sudden motion, advanced, and stood in front of his enemy. Noddy reached his hand back toward his pocket, as if to draw a weapon. With a quickness that could not be guarded against, Mr. Newton swung the poker around, and brought it down on Noddy's arm, making the fellow howl with pain.

"You'll pay for this!" the man yelled.

Mr. Newton took advantage of the confusion which his attack had caused. He sprang to the door, and, with three blows from his weapon had shattered the lock. He threw the portal open, and dashed out into the hall.

"Stop him!" yelled Noddy.

"You're too late!" called back the reporter.

"You'll be sorry for this!" Noddy's voice sounded through the passageway, as Mr. Newton sped away. "We've only just begun our campaign against your friends. Our next move will not be so easy on you!"

The noise of the blows on the door had brought a score or more of frightened Chinese from their rooms in the building, and they crowded into the halls and on the stairs as the reporter hur-

ried out. This gave Mr. Newton one advantage, for the opening of the doors made the passages light.

In their frightened, cackling voices the Chinese sounded not unlike a lot of scared hens and roosters. In their anxiety to see what was going on, and perhaps in a desire to escape from what they evidently considered a raid by the police, some of the Celestials got in Mr. Newton's way. He pushed through the throng, knocking some of the Mongolians over, at which they yelled louder than before.

Out into Pell Street sped the reporter, expecting to be pursued by some of the gang. But when he had reached the middle of the thoroughfare, which, even at the midnight hour, was well filled with people, he saw that no one was after him.

His sudden exit from the house, and the noise he left behind him, seemed to attract no attention, as the people of that neighborhood were used to all sorts of queer affairs, and it was considered impolite, in Pell Street, to inquire too closely into your neighbor's business.

"Well, that was a lucky and rather narrow escape," mused Mr. Newton, as he made his way toward the Bowery. "I guess I made a mistake in going up against that gang alone. I'll know better next time. I've failed on this occasion, and we are as far off as ever from getting the deed, but I have another plan."

Thinking Larry might be anxious to know the result of his attempt, Mr. Newton went to his friend's house. Beyond telling him he had failed, the older reporter did not acquaint Larry with the details of the attack and the escape.

"What do you suppose became of Peter?" asked Larry.

"Oh, I guess he was somewhere in the house," replied Mr. Newton. "It was like the other houses in Chinatown, a regular rabbit warren, with half a dozen entrances. He could go in one way, and out another. But I'll land 'em yet."

"What do you plan to do next?"

"To tell you the truth, I haven't made up my mind," Mr. Newton replied. "I'm sort of up against a stone wall. I want to sleep over it. Then, perhaps, I shall hit on something."

It was now nearly one o'clock in the morning. Larry and Mr. Newton had been standing out in front of the Dexter apartments, for Larry did not want his mother to know about the quest, fearing she would worry over it. So, when Mr. Newton called on him, the two had gone outside.

"We can't do anything more now," remarked Larry.

"No, and I guess I'll go home, and go to bed," said Mr. Newton. "I'm all tired out."

Bidding Larry good-night, Mr. Newton started off down the street. The neighborhood was rather poorly lighted, the lamps being few and far between. Pondering over the strange

mix-up he had become involved in, the reporter was proceeding along rather absent-mindedly.

Suddenly his attention was attracted by someone in the house opposite him opening a window, and shouting:

"Thieves! Murder! Fire! Police!"

"That sounds like trouble," thought Mr. Newton. "I seem to be going to put in a full night of it."

"Help! Help! Help!" the voice, which was that of a woman, continued to yell. "I'm being robbed!"

Mr. Newton placed his fingers to his lips, and blew a long, shrill whistle. He thought if there was a policeman in the neighborhood he would hear it, and hurry to the woman's aid. Meanwhile Mr. Newton decided to do what he could singlehanded.

"What's the trouble?" he inquired.

"It's robbers!" the woman exclaimed. "They are trying to get into my room, and steal my diamonds!"

"Are they there now?"

"They're in the house. I heard them run downstairs, and they're hiding in the dining-room. Oh, please, dear, good, kind Mr. Man, won't you save me!"

"I don't believe any burglars will remain around long with that screaming going on," thought Mr. Newton.

By this time windows all over the neighbor-

hood were going up, heads were poked out, and half a score of voices asked what the trouble was. One excited man fired his revolver.

Several policemen came up on the run, and, seeing Mr. Newton, who was the only person in the street at that time, they all made a dash for him.

"We've caught you!" one of the bluecoats cried.

"So I see," remarked Mr. Newton, calmly. "What are you going to do with me?"

"It'll be state's prison for yours," the officer went on, taking a firmer grip of Mr. Newton's arm.

"He isn't the one at all!" exclaimed the woman who had given the first alarm. "He was going to capture the burglar for me!"

"What burglar?" cried the policemen, in a chorus.

"The one in the dining-room!"

Mr. Newton rapidly explained what had happened. One of the officers took a closer look at the reporter.

"I know him!" the bluecoat exclaimed. "He's on the *Leader*. Come on, boys, let's get the burglar!"

The officers, thinking there would be a chance to distinguish themselves, went up the steps of the house, the woman having called to them that she would come down, and open the door. When the policemen got inside they made a careful

search all over the premises, but could find no burglar.

"I'm sure I heard one!" the woman insisted.

"You mean you heard a noise," corrected one of the policemen.

"Well, it was just the kind of a noise a burglar would make."

Just then there came a series of thumps from the hall.

"There it is again!" cried the woman.

"There's the burglar!"

The officers made a rush for the passageway.

CHAPTER XVII

SETTING A TRAP

THE sounds increased in loudness. There seemed to be a struggle going on in the hall, which was dark, and Mr. Newton, hearing the scuffle, thought perhaps he might get a burglar story after all.

"I've got him!" cried one of the policemen.

The words were followed by a long drawn-out and plaintive howl.

"Here's the burglar!" exclaimed another bluecoat, as he and his companions entered the dining-room, where the woman had lighted the gas.

The officer held up a big cat, whose head was fast inside a milk pitcher. The animal, in search of a drink, had stuck its nose into the receptacle, and had been caught. In its efforts to free itself it had thumped the pitcher over the floor, producing the sounds which had alarmed the woman.

"Why, it's my Teddy!" the woman exclaimed. "I wonder how I will ever get the pitcher off."

"I'll show you," replied a bluecoat. With a blow of his club he broke the pitcher without hurting the cat, which, as soon as it was released, ran, and hid under the table.

"I'm sure I'm much obliged to all of you," the

woman said. "I was sure I was going to be murdered by a burglar."

"We're sorry it wasn't one," said one of the officers. "I mean," he hastened to add, "not wishin' ye any harm, of course, mum, but we'd like the chance of catchin' a burglar, seein' as how times is a little dull."

Laughing among themselves the policemen filed out. In the meanwhile quite a crowd had gathered outside, for the rumor had spread that a woman had been robbed and murdered, and scores of neighbors had hastily dressed and come out.

"Here they come!" several persons exclaimed, as the officers came out. "Where's the burglar?"

"We left him there," replied one of the policemen. "He lives there. His name is Mr. Thomas Cat."

"Oh!" a score or more exclaimed, much disappointed. Then, after hearing all the particulars, they went back to bed.

Mr. Newton remained to get the woman's name, as he intended to write up a funny story of the burglar scare. It was past two o'clock when he reached home, and he slept so soundly that he was late getting to work next morning. However, Mr. Emborg said nothing, when told of the cat episode, and told the reporter to take his time, and turn out a good account of the "burglar."

Larry, as did the other reporters, had a busy time of it that day. There were several fires,

a number of accidents, and a shooting case. Mr. Newton had scarcely a chance to speak to his friend, and Larry was anxious for the last edition to get under way, so he might inquire whether Mr. Newton had thought up any new plan to get back the deed and bring the safe-robbers to justice.

When the last forms had gone to the stereotypers, and no other news remained to go into the paper, unless something big, necessitating an extra, should occur, Larry found a chance to ask:

"Well, Mr. Newton, have you thought of a plan?"

"I have," was the answer. "It occurred to me only a little while ago. I think it's a pretty good one."

"What is it?"

"It involves another visit to our chemist friend, Mr. Hosfer," replied Mr. Newton. "I think we'll enlist his aid in this case. He's a sort of amateur detective among his other accomplishments."

So that evening they went to the chemist's house. They found him in the midst of his bottles and test tubes, working away, while a most unpleasant odor pervaded the laboratory.

"I'll be with you in a minute," called the chemist, as Larry and Mr. Newton entered. "I can't seem to get this mixture just right."

"It seems plenty strong enough," remarked Mr. Newton, holding his handkerchief to his nose. "What in the world is it?"

"Something with which to take out inkstains. Do you object to the smell?"

"Well, it isn't exactly what you would call a perfume," said Mr. Newton.

"It's got to be strong, you know," said Mr. Hosfer. "Otherwise it would not work. But I'll stop for a while, and talk to you. I suppose you have some horrible, mysterious, sensational, blood-curdling, hair-raising, nerve-racking case on your hands. Oh, you reporters are the most terrible fellows in the world! Living amid blood and thunder, it's a wonder to me you ever sleep," and laughing heartily, in strange contrast to his rather exciting language, Mr. Hosfer came forward, and shook hands with them.

"The smell don't come off," he said, with a smile.

"I wish some of it would go out," remarked Mr. Newton. "Can't you open a window or—or make some other odor take its place? It smells like a skunk factory in here."

"Wait, I'll fix it," replied the chemist. From several bottles he poured a mixture into a glass. This he stirred up, and then put into an atomizer. He sprayed the stuff all around the apartment, and soon a most agreeable odor was noticeable in the air of the room.

"That's better," came from Larry. "What is it?"

"An imitation of violet perfume," answered Mr. Hosfer.

"It smells like the real thing," ventured Mr. Newton.

"Well, it's like most perfumes. Very few of them ever see the flowers they're named after," commented the chemist. "Now what horrible happening brought you here?"

"It isn't exactly horrible," replied Mr. Newton, "but I'll admit it's something of a mystery, and it may develop into a sensational case."

"I knew it!" exclaimed Mr. Hosfer. "You couldn't keep away from sensationalism and terrible things if you tried. Now tell me all about it. I like excitement."

"You remember me coming here with that blue paper?" asked Mr. Newton.

"Sure. The one with nitro-glycerine stains on it."

"That's the one. Well, now I want you to find something that will take those stains from a man's hand."

"I guess that would be hard work. Those acid stains go in pretty deep, and stay until the skin wears off, as I told you."

"Well, you have something that will pretty nearly take them out, haven't you?"

"Oh, I guess I could find some chemical that would make them fade out somewhat."

"That's what I want you to do. When you find it you're going to put an advertisement in the paper stating that you can remove all sorts of stains from hands and faces. In short, you're

going to become a sort of skin doctor for a while," said Mr. Newton.

"What's it all about?" asked the chemist.

Then Mr. Newton told Mr. Hosfer the main facts in connection with the safe-robbery, and the theft of Larry's deed. He related how they had gotten on the track of the blue-handed man, but how the quest for the deed had failed.

"I'm afraid if we cause his arrest we will never see the deed again," said Mr. Newton. "Besides we really have no evidence that would stand in court if they got a clever lawyer to defend Noddy, as he is called. We must work without the aid of the authorities for the present. We want to get the deed back first. Then we want some clues to the others concerned in the safe-robbery, and, last, I want to get on the track of the land operators, for I am sure there is a big swindle going on there that concerns the Board of Aldermen."

"How can I help you by becoming a skin doctor?" asked the chemist.

"In this way," replied the reporter. "We will put the advertisement in the paper. Unless I am very much mistaken it will be seen and read by Noddy, the blue-handed man. I am sure he would only be too glad to get rid of the stains, and so save himself the trouble of wearing gloves. Besides, he knows we are after him, and that his hands offer a rather easy mark of identification."

"But he could go to some other doctor who makes a business of removing stains from hands and faces," suggested Mr. Hosfer.

"Yes, he could, but I don't believe he will. I have no doubt he has thought of that plan, but, you see, the trouble is he wants to keep under cover. If he went to an ordinary doctor he might be asked embarrassing questions, such as how the stains came on his hands. This might lead to unpleasant results. No, Noddy wants to keep under cover, and we'll respect his wishes, at least for a while."

"We'll put in the advertisement about you," Mr. Newton went on, "that all cases are strictly confidential, and that no questions are asked. That will catch Noddy, and he'll walk into our trap."

"What will I do when I get him?" asked the chemist. "Preserve him in alcohol?"

"I think we'll make no attempt to capture him," said Mr. Newton. "That is, at first. If he calls at your laboratory use some of the preparation which you are to make, on his hands. Don't make it very strong, and take only a little of the stain off. Tell him he will have to come again. In this way he can be induced to pay several visits to you."

"In the meanwhile I can be working my end of the game. Have all the visits at night. Tell him you can treat him at no other time. That will give me a chance to be on hand. I'll follow him

when he leaves here, and I may be able to get on the track of the deed."

"It sounds like a good scheme," commented the chemist. "I'll get right to work on the stain-removing mixture."

"And I'll look after the advertisement," said Mr. Newton.

"Suppose a lot of people come to have stains removed?" suggested Mr. Hosfer. "What am I to do?"

"Why, remove the stains, of course," replied Mr. Newton. "You may to be able to make a lot of money out of this."

"I'll lose a lot of valuable time," said the chemist. "But never mind, I'll do it to help you out."

The next day there appeared in several papers an advertisement to the effect that the celebrated chemist, Mr. Hosfer, would remove stains of all kinds from the hands or face for a moderate sum. All cases were to be treated in strict confidence, and no questions were to be asked, it was stated.

"There, that ought to catch him," said Mr. Newton, as he read it over.

It was several days before he was able to pay Mr. Hosfer a visit again. When he and Larry called on the chemist they found him busier than ever in his laboratory.

"Did he come?" asked Mr. Newton.

"Did he come?" repeated Mr. Hosfer. "Say, I'm sorry I ever consented to this. I'll bet I've removed stains from a hundred hands in the last

two days! I'm nearly exhausted by the business."

"But did Noddy come?"

"I'll tell you all about it," said Mr. Hosfer, laying aside a test tube, and sitting down in a chair.

CHAPTER XVIII

ELECTION NIGHT

"I HAD no idea," the chemist continued, "how many people there were in New York who had stains that they desired removed from their hands or faces. It's astonishing, that's what it is. Men and women came here, covered with ink, or else marked with acids and chemicals, and wanted me to make 'em look nice again so they could go to a dance, or appear in public. Mothers brought their sons and daughters, all marked up from playing with paint or something else, and wanted me to make 'em right again."

"But did Noddy come?" insisted Mr. Newton.

"Wait, I'm coming to that," replied Mr. Hosfer, "but I have to tell it in my own way. After about a hundred ordinary people had called on me, I began to think our trap was a failure, since the bird we wanted did not come. In the meanwhile I had used up about ten dollars' worth of chemicals removing stains."

"Didn't any of them offer to pay you?" asked Larry.

"Not a one," replied the chemist, sadly. "I guess they thought this was a dispensary for the poor. Well, never mind that. But last evening,

just as I was about to close up the shop, there came a ring at the bell, and in came a man, who, the minute I set eyes on him, I knew to be the person we wanted."

"It was Noddy, eh?" asked Mr. Newton.

"That's who it was. He had on a pair of gloves, and he seemed quite nervous. He wanted to know if it was all straight about the advertisement, and I told him it was. That I wouldn't ask any questions, but would remove any stains he might have, and only charge him a small sum."

"What did he say?" asked Mr. Newton.

"Said he didn't care what it cost. Then he pulled off his gloves, and showed me the bluest pair of hands you ever saw. The moment I saw 'em I knew he was our man. But I didn't say anything."

"Is he coming again?" asked Mr. Newton, anxiously.

"This very evening," replied Mr. Hosfer. "I used a weak solution of acid, and only took part of the stain off. I told him he would have to come back for three evenings, and he promised to be here about nine o'clock to-night!"

"It's almost that now," observed Larry. "We'd better get out of the way."

"That's so," remarked Mr. Newton. "Now this is my plan. Have you some place where you can hide us, Mr. Hosfer?"

"I guess so."

"Well, I want to follow Noddy when he goes

from here. I think I can do it with better success than I did in the case of Peter. I must find out where he lives, since I am convinced he has the deed in his possession."

"You and Larry can go into the next room," said the chemist. "You can hear everything that goes on in here, and when Noddy starts to leave, after I have treated him, you can be all ready to follow. He'll never see you."

"That's a good idea," spoke Mr. Newton. "We'd better go in now. He may be along at any moment."

They had hardly entered the room opening off from the laboratory when there came a knock at the door, and Noddy entered.

Through a crack in the portal Mr. Newton watched the blue-handed man. Noddy seemed ill at ease. He still wore his gloves, but he took them off soon after entering the laboratory.

"Now we'll try the second application," Larry and Mr. Newton heard Mr. Hosfer say. "This will almost do the trick."

"I hope you'll soon be done," Noddy said. "I'm getting tired of wearing these gloves around. You see," he volunteered, "I spilled some bluing on my hands as I was helping my wife with the wash, and it looks rather bad; that's the reason I want to get rid of it."

"I'll soon fix you," remarked Mr. Hosfer, paying no attention to the explanation Noddy offered.

The chemist applied several solutions to Noddy's hands, and, under his treatment, the blue color faded somewhat. The chemist knew it could not be taken out entirely, but he did not consider it his place to tell the man so. It was a case of wits being matched against wits, and the chemist favored the side of justice.

"That's all I can do for you to-night," Mr. Hosfer remarked at length, speaking in loud tones, so Mr. Newton, in the next room, could hear him. "Come to-morrow or next day."

"I wish you could finish with me," remarked Noddy. "I want to get rid of this stain, and go away."

"I'm doing the best I can," replied Mr. Hosfer. "Yours is a bad case."

"It's a good deal worse than you think," muttered the man.

A few minutes later Noddy left the house. Mr. Newton was close after him, trailing him along the half-deserted streets. Larry had been left behind, with instructions to await the older reporter's return.

For a number of blocks Mr. Newton had no trouble in keeping after Noddy. The suspected safe-robber wore a light hat, which was conspicuous among the throng of people on the thoroughfares, most of whom had on dark headgear.

"I think I'll land him this time," murmured Mr. Newton. "I'll not run my head into a Chinese den again, though. He seems to be heading for

a respectable part of town. I guess our trick's going to work."

It was now about ten o'clock. Noddy had reached Union Square, and was crossing the small park near Broadway. Close behind him, taking care not to be seen, was Mr. Newton. There was quite a throng in the streets, and many vehicles.

Suddenly an automobile, the driver of which seemed to lose his head, rammed a trolley car. The crash was heard for some distance, and, though no one was hurt in the accident, it caused a blockade. Noddy halted to see what the trouble was, and Mr. Newton found himself on the outskirts of quite a crowd that was collecting.

Just then Noddy turned, and, by some chance, looked straight at the reporter who was trailing him. One glance was enough for Noddy. He seemed to sink down amid the throng. Mr. Newton made his way farther into the midst of the crowd, but all traces of Noddy were lost. There was no sign of the light hat.

"Well, that's bad luck!" exclaimed Mr. Newton. "I guess our plan's knocked in the head."

Nor was he mistaken, for Noddy did not come back to the chemist's the next night. The trap had proved a failure.

"I guess we'll have to let the thing go for a while," said Mr. Newton to Larry, on the afternoon following the unsuccessful trailing of Noddy. "Election's coming on now, and we'll

both be pretty busy. I don't believe the gang will dare to do anything, now that they know we're after them. I think we can let things rest for a while."

Larry agreed with this idea. As Mr. Newton had said, there was plenty of work about the *Leader* office now. There was a three-sided campaign on that year. The Democrats had their candidates, as did the Republicans. Then there was an Independent ticket in the field. These men had a number of issues which they wanted to see win. Altogether it was what politicians call a "hot" campaign.

It was drawing to a close, however. In another week there would come the election, when all questions would be settled.

Larry had his first experience in a big newspaper office during the most exciting time; that is, on an election night.

For several days the older reporters had been making up tables on which the returns were to be set down as they came in from each district. Mr. Emberg and his assistants were working early and late to get things into shape.

Election day passed itself off quietly enough. The political writers were kept busy, telling how things seemed to look according to early information, but as for forecasting who was elected no one could do that. All day the battle of the ballots continued.

The *Leader*, being an afternoon paper, was go-

ing to issue a morning extra. To get this out the men would have to work all night, in addition to being on duty all day. It was hard on them, but they didn't mind it once a year.

No sooner had the last edition gone to press in the afternoon than preparations were made for getting out the next morning's extra. The men in charge of the tables got them ready, spreading them out on large boards. The tables looked like big-sized war maps, with little blocks and spaces for each election district, a place devoted to each candidate, and squares where the total vote might be cast up.

In the different polling places the last ballots were being put into boxes. The clerks and judges, with their eye on the clock, stood ready to call "time," when the hour of sunset should be marked. The last voters were being corraled. In a few minutes the big contest would be over, all excepting the counting of the tickets.

At each polling place policemen were stationed. It was the duty of the bluecoats to take charge of the ballot box, after the tickets had been counted. The officers had blanks, prepared by the different papers, and these were brought to City Hall, where the tally was taken.

The newspapers had men at this point to make a record of the votes each candidate received. This record was quickly transmitted to the office, either by messenger or telephone.

As he had had no experience at this work

Larry was only a sort of reserve man, being held in readiness to be sent out on ordinary news. As the night was dull, except for election, he had a chance to see how the paper got the returns.

At the big tables half a dozen men were stationed, anxiously waiting. With pencils poised they stood ready to jot down the figures under each candidate's name. It was very quiet, and there was no excitement. Each man knew what he had to do, and was ready to do it.

In rushed a messenger. He carried a long slip. This he handed to the man at the first table, the "caller-off." "Seventeenth assembly district," cried the reporter, and then in low but distinct tones he read each candidate's name, and gave his vote. In the proper squares the markers set the figures down. There were several sets of tables, and, as soon as one was filled, the slip was passed to the set of men at the next one.

In this way hundreds of districts were recorded. Through the night the work went on. As soon as a district was completed the talliers would cut it out from the sheet, and call off the figures to another man, who sat at an adding machine. This man quickly computed the total vote, and it was set down.

Then the section of table was rushed upstairs to the composing room, where the printers quickly, on their type-setting machines, made a duplicate of it.

Toward the end the work became hard and tir-

ing. The returns came piling in, and the nerve tension under which the men worked was tremendous. But there was little excitement.

Finally the returns were all in. Then came the tedious task of figuring the totals, for on this depended the result of the election, and finding out which party had won.

"Click! Click! Click!" went the adding machines. Number after number the reporters called off. Upstairs in the composing room the type-machines were working overtime.

Everyone was under a great strain. Seconds seemed like minutes. At times, during a lull, the ticking of the clock sounded like the firing of a rifle. In corners of the room experts were figuring pluralities and majorities. Other reporters were writing interviews with winning or losing candidates. Still others were describing the scenes on the streets, the torchlight processions, the happenings at the political headquarters, and telling what the effect of the Board of Aldermen changing from one party to the other would be.

There was not an idle person in the room. The city editor was here, there, everywhere. He seemed to be carrying the responsibility of a dozen men. He was telling everyone to hurry, as it was time for the morning extra to be out on the street.

At last the final additions were made. The last computations were completed.

"The Independents have won!" was the cry.

"Hurrah!" came the shouts from outside.

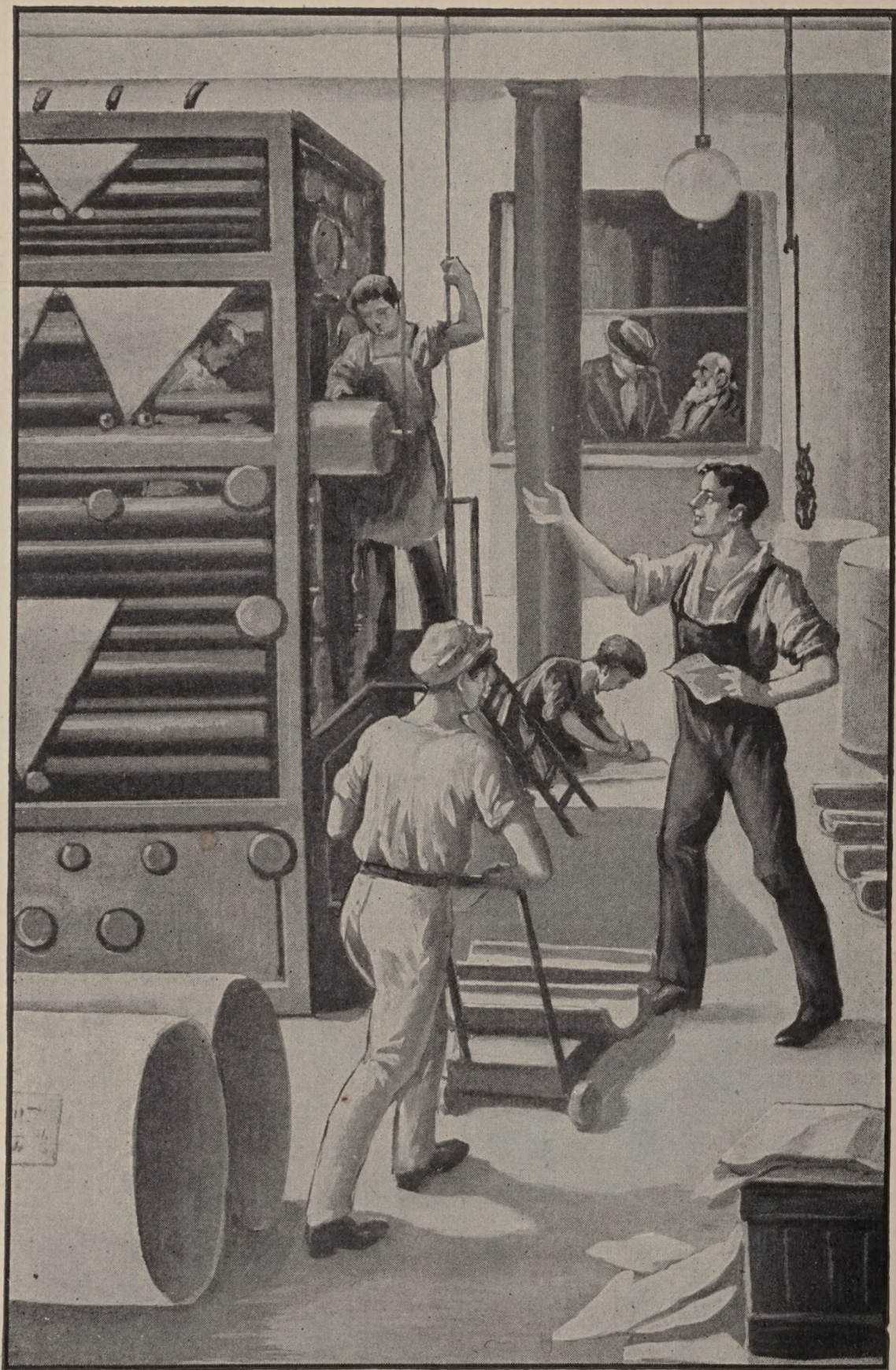
The last form was sent down. The stereotypers were working like mad. The hungry presses were waiting. The engine was at full steam.

Out from the casting machine came the half-curved plates of type from which the papers were to be printed. Half-naked men clamped them upon the cylinders. They contained the thousands of figures that told the story of the battle of the ballots. The last plate was slapped into place.

"All ready!" cried the foreman.

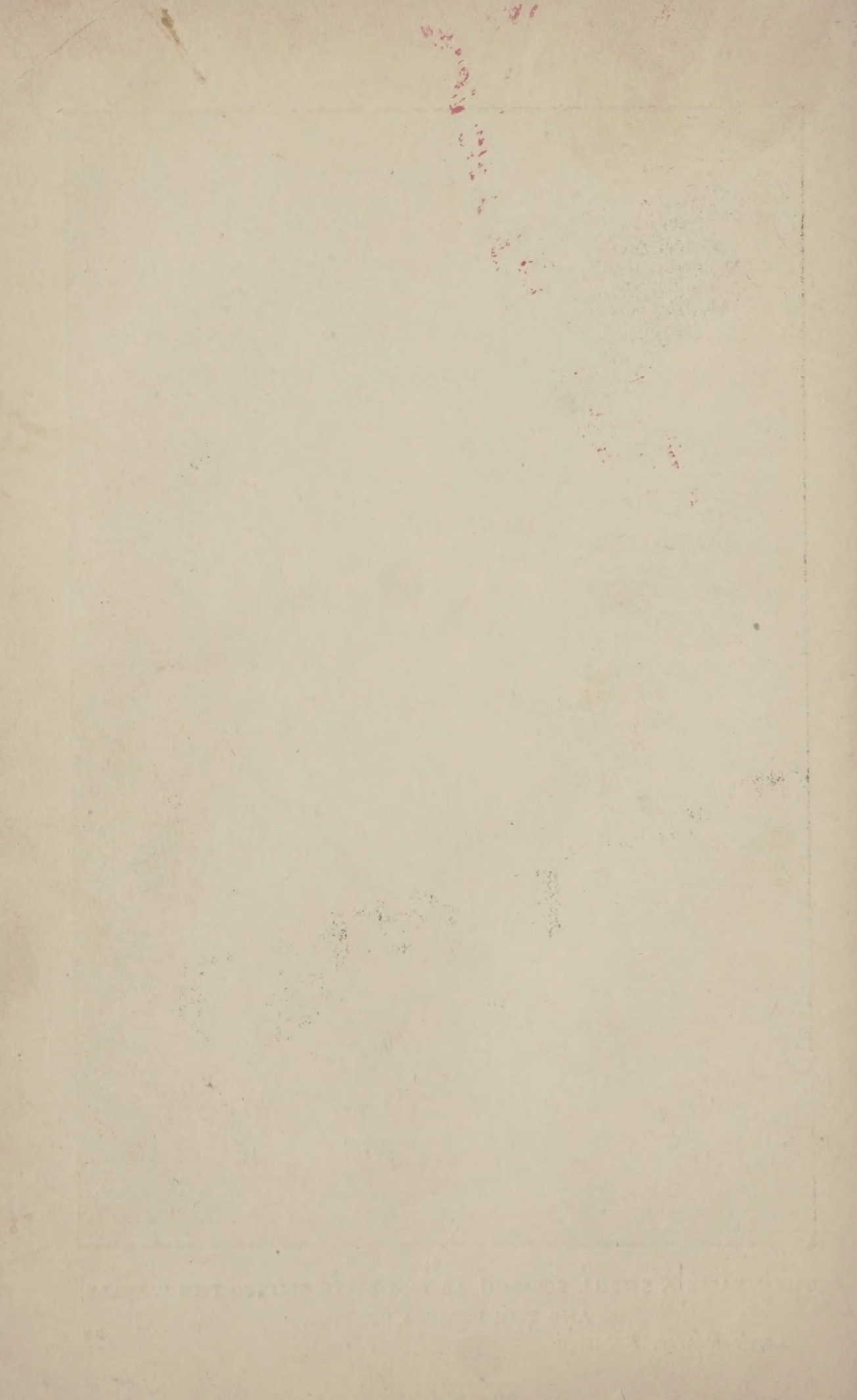
A bell rang. The engine started. There was a subdued roar. There was a rattle, a bang, a throb of the basement floor. Then came a shrill screech as the belts gripped the wheels, and the machinery started. In another instant the roar became a steady thunder, and hundreds of papers a minute began falling from the presses.

The election extra was out.



THEN CAME A SHRILL SCREECH AS THE BELTS GRIPPED THE WHEELS,
AND THE PRESSES STARTED.

Larry Dexter, Reporter



CHAPTER XIX

A QUEER LETTER

It was just getting dawn when the reporters, editors, and copy readers, who had worked so hard on the extra, stopped, and had a breathing spell. Down in the street the newsboys were crying their wares in shrill tones. The thoroughfares were almost deserted, however, save by a few night-workers who were hurrying home. In a little while, though, they would be thronged by crowds anxious to buy papers, to scan the returns, for not everyone remains up late enough to find out who is elected.

Larry thought, now that the paper was out, there would be a chance for all hands to go to bed, and get some sleep. But as the *Leader* was an afternoon paper, and the election extra was a sort of side line, the entire force, without having had a wink of sleep, had to turn in and get ready for the regular issue.

"But before we do that we'll have breakfast," remarked Mr. Emberg. So he took the crowd of reporters to a nearby restaurant, where some hot coffee and wheat cakes with maple syrup made everyone feel a bit fresher, though there were many sleepy eyes in the city room that day.

Larry thought he never would be able to stick it out. Every now and then, in the midst of his writing, he would find his head nodding toward the desk, and he would just catch himself in time. He looked around somewhat sheepishly at such times, but no one seemed to be noticing him. As a matter of fact everyone else had momentary failings.

Aside from going over the returns, and making some corrections, getting interviews from defeated candidates and leaders who told how they had been whipped, and talks with successful ones, who told how the people were sure to be benefited by the new party, there was not much news that day.

A few fires, none of them very big, several robberies, and a number of accidents, one or which proved fatal, made up the day's happenings. Usually a general lack of news was something to be regarded as an undesirable happening, but the day after election even the editors were too weary to want many items.

The paper closed early that afternoon, and Larry went straight home, ate a hearty supper, and then tumbled into bed. He slept like a top until the sun, streaming in at his window, awakened him, and then he felt as if a few hours more would have done him no harm.

But he felt freshened up, and, making a hearty breakfast, went to the office. He was among the first to arrive. Mr. Newton was there, busily en-

gaged in writing at his desk. He looked up when Larry entered.

"Anything new?" he asked, and Larry shook his head, knowing his friend referred to the deed.

"We'll have to get busy on that again, now," spoke Mr. Newton, coming over to where Larry was. "It will not do to let the gang think we have given up."

"But what can we do?" asked Larry.

"We'll wait, and see if they don't do something first," replied Mr. Newton. "They may show us a little more of their hand, and give us a better clew to work on. I guess we can't depend any more on Mr. Hosfer to help us. He will be suspected by the gang from now on. We'll have to think up a new plan."

"Do you suppose they'll be after me again, to sign the deed?" asked Larry.

"I presume so. They must have your signature, as well as that of your mother. In fact, I doubt if they could get possession of the property, even if you and your mother did sign. You see, it belongs to you, your mother, and the other children jointly. It would be necessary for you all to sign, and, as you and the other children are not of age, your signatures would be of no value. The courts would have to be appealed to to appoint a guardian for you. But the gang evidently think that if they get your signature, and that of your mother, they can pass the deed off for genu-

ine on some unsuspecting purchaser, without waiting for the other names."

"Have you any idea about why they are so anxious to get the land?" asked Larry.

"Nothing, except I am sure there is some big move afoot in that part of town. It concerns the city, but what it is I can't learn, though I've tried in all the ways I know. I'm only afraid some other paper will find out before I do, and get a beat on me as well as spoiling our chance to get the deed back. But that's one of the risks you take in this business."

"Then the only thing to do is to wait?" asked Larry.

"That's all."

It was three days after this that a strange letter came, addressed to Larry. And' an odd enough one it was. Instead of the address being written, or printed by hand, or on a typewriter, the name, number, and street had all been cut from some paper or book, and pasted on the envelope. It was a slow and laborious piece of work, and the persons who sent it must have had plenty of time at their disposal. At first Larry thought it was a joke.

But when he had opened the envelope, and taken out the single sheet of paper it contained, he was sure it was no joke, but something quite different.

"Phew!" he whistled, softly.

The words in the letter had been cut separately

from a newspaper, and pasted one after another to make sentences.

"This is odd," thought Larry. "I wonder why anyone who wanted to write me a letter could not do it in the usual way. This was a lot of work."

But when he had read the missive through he was more puzzled than ever. It seemed to be nothing but a lot of words jumbled together. There was no sense to it.

"If it was Valentine's day, I'd think someone was sending me a new-fashioned kind," thought Larry. "But as it is, I guess it's a Chinese puzzle."

Once more he read the letter through slowly. This is what he saw:

"To impossible the suddenness boy forever who nevermind found whatever the inexperienced paper delivery with upside blue showcase marks satin we lace give devoted you steam one furnace week pencil to ink make Hudson up ever your Brazil mind pig after cows that fence rail look evidently for concise the farm loss plow of cart the automobile small steamboat one teapot who stove bears umbrella the typewriter name ribbon of door a couch martyred dog president lamp he seemingly will purpose be desire taken curtain from when you deliberate when always you regular least sat expect train sign doormat deed impossible at tiger once."

"Well, if that isn't foolish, I'd like to know what is," remarked Larry.

The oftener he read it the stranger it seemed. Then he turned it upside down, and tried to read it backward, but it was as bad one way as the other.

"I guess I'll throw it away," he remarked. "No, I'll save it, and show Mr. Newton," he said, on second thought. "Maybe some of the fellows in the office sent it to me for fun. He'll probably know about it."

The next morning he took the strange letter to the office with him, having said nothing to his mother about it, for fear she would worry.

"She'd say it came from the Black Hand society, or the Mafia," he thought, as the papers were full of stories concerning these blackmailers.

"Any news?" asked Mr. Newton, when he greeted Larry.

"Nothing special," replied the lad. "Someone has been having a little fun with me, I guess."

"How?"

Larry produced the oddly-constructed letter, and gave it to Mr. Newton. At first the older reporter glanced carelessly at it. Then he looked more carefully over it, and a puzzled look came into his face.

"Can you make any sense out of it?" asked Larry.

"Well, not exactly. That is, not right away."

"Do you mean you ever expect to be able to?"

"I might."

"But it's all nonsense. Just as if I took a lot of words at random, and jotted them down. It reads as good backwards as it does frontwards."

"Of course it does. That's the way they intended."

"Who intended?"

"The persons who sent you this cipher message."

"Is this a cipher?"

"It certainly is, and it's evidently a very easy one, or the gang would never have sent it. They evidently want to scare you a bit."

"Do you think the gang that stole the deed sent this?"

"I certainly do."

"And can you read what's in it?"

"Not at once, but I'm going to try. They're laughing at us, Larry, but we'll laugh at them soon. Now to solve this cipher."

CHAPTER XX

SOLVING THE CIPHER

MUCH as he would have liked to go to work on it at once, Mr. Newton was obliged to postpone his beginning of solving the problem. There were a number of stories he had to go out on, and Larry, likewise, was kept busy. It was late in the afternoon when they found a chance to speak of the strange letter again.

"I tell you what," said Mr. Newton, "suppose you come over to my house this evening, and we'll tackle the cipher. It may be important for us to solve it as soon as possible."

"I'll come," said Larry.

Mr. Newton lived in a sort of bachelor hotel. He had several rooms, and when Larry called that evening, he found his friend seated at a large table, on which were spread out a number of sheets of paper, several pencils, and some books. In the center of the table was the cipher letter Larry had received, which he had given Mr. Newton that afternoon.

"Are you making any headway?" asked Larry.

"Not very much," confessed Mr. Newton. "I have been studying the thing, trying to see where to start. Take a look at it yourself, and see if

it suggests anything to you. Two heads are better than one, any day."

Larry puzzled over the paper for several minutes, but was obliged to admit that the more he looked at it the more of a puzzle it became.

"What sort of a cipher is it, anyhow?" he asked. "What is a cipher? I've often heard of them, but I never saw one before."

"A cipher is merely a message from one person to another," said Mr. Newton. "It is written in such a way as to prevent any third person, in whose hand it may fall, from learning the contents. Each of the persons in the secret has a key to the cipher.

"There are simple ciphers and elaborate ones. There is one used by the United States war and other officials that is very elaborate, and when messages are sent in it, there is a lot of work getting at the real meaning. That is done to prevent enemies learning what the message contains.

"But I do not suppose this cipher is very difficult. The trouble is, it is so simple that it is puzzling. I have tried a number of methods used on fairly hard ciphers, but I can make nothing of it."

"What in the world do you suppose they wrote in cipher for, anyhow?" asked Larry.

"To try and scare you a bit, I reckon. The more mystery they throw around it the worse they think they have you frightened."

"How have you tried to solve it?"

"Well, first I went on the supposition that it

was a letter cipher. That is, that you must pick out certain letters in each word, and then put them together to make sense. I tried several different methods on this line, but all I get is a lot of words as meaningless as those in the cipher."

"What are you going to do next?"

"I'm going to take out all the words that seem to have any bearing on our matters. I'll set them down, and try to make sense of them."

Accordingly, with Larry to help, Mr. Newton wrote down the following: blue, marks, ink, farm, door, and deed.

"Those are all that I see that concern us directly," he said. "There is 'blue,' for the blue-handed man; 'marks,' which he had on his hand; 'ink,' which might refer to Mr. Hosfer's attempts; 'farm,' which certainly refers to you; 'door,' which is what had the blue mark on it when I went into Chinatown; and 'deed,' which is what we're after. Now we'll see if I can get anything out of them."

Mr. Newton tried by combining various letters in each word to get a meaning from the cipher. It was of no avail. Then he started on still another method.

This was to string all the words together so they formed a meaningless jumble of letters.

"Now we'll go along and take every second letter regardless of the words they are in," he said.

He did this, and after making several selections, he had this as a result:

OMOSBEHSDENSBYOE EW.

"That's no go," he announced, after staring at the combination. That would never make sense. I'll try every third letter."

This time he got:

IOIEEDNSOO.

"Stuck again," he commented. "Too many vowels to get any words that would mean anything out of that."

However, he was not discouraged. He tried the same plan, using respectively the fourth to the tenth letter in the conglomeration. But each time he had to admit defeat.

"It gets me," said Mr. Newton, at length. "If I could only stumble on one or two words I think I could find out the system. The rest would be easy."

"Have you tried taking every seventh word?" asked Larry. "We boys in the country used to consider seven a lucky number."

"We'll try it, just for luck, then," spoke Mr. Newton. He quickly set down every seventh word, and had this result when he had gone a little way:

WHO DELIVERY WE FURNACE UP
COWS THE AUTOMOBILE.

"That's odd," commented Mr. Newton. "We can make a sentence of that anyhow. Listen: 'We, the furnace who deliver up automobile cows,' though it doesn't make any sense."

"Try some other way of taking the words,"

went on Larry. "Maybe we'd better begin at the end, and work up."

"Well, we'll try your plan for a change," agreed Mr. Newton. "Take every seventh word from the end. This is what we get: 'Sign be dog name teapot of evidently,' and so on. Not much to that."

Then, in very weariness he and Larry sat staring at the paper which they felt sure contained a hidden message for them.

"Let's give it up," suggested Larry. "If they want to send us any word let them do it in the right way."

"No, I'm not going to give up so easily," said Mr. Newton. "I'll have another try at it. Hand the cipher over."

Larry, who had been scanning the mysterious paper, passed it across the table to Mr. Newton. To do so he had to move it in front of a drop gas lamp. As the paper came between Mr. Newton's eyes and the light the reporter gave a sudden cry. He fairly grabbed the paper from Larry, and looked at it closely. He seemed somewhat disappointed. Then he held it up to the light again.

"Did you put those marks on this?" he asked of Larry.

"No, what marks?"

"These tiny dots on the back."

"I haven't touched the cipher," said Larry, wondering what Mr. Newton meant.

"Then I think I have it solved!" exclaimed the reporter. "I wonder I didn't think of this before. Come here!"

Larry came around to that side of the table. He looked through the half-transparent cipher, and saw below certain of the words a small, black dot. The dots were made on the back of the document, and only showed through when it was held to the light.

"We're on the track at last!" cried Mr. Newton. "Here, Larry, you write down the words I call off."

Then, with fingers that trembled so he could scarcely hold the pencil, Larry set this down:

"To the boy who found the paper with blue marks, we give you one week to make up your mind, after that, look for the loss of the small one who bears the name of a martyred president, he will be taken from you when you least expect. sign deed at once."

"What does that mean?" asked Larry.

"We'll soon see. The first sentence is easily enough set off. 'To the boy who found the paper with blue marks.' You see, they have simply used every other word in the cipher. It was so easy it was hard. Now, then, we'll go on. 'To the boy, etc.,' that means you. The next sentence reads: 'We give you one week to make up your mind.' The rest reads, properly punctu-

ated: 'After that, look for the loss of the small one who bears the name of a martyred President. He will be taken from you when you least expect. Sign deed at once.'"

"What does that mean about the small one bearing the name of a martyred president?" asked Larry.

"First consider who were the martyred presidents," suggested Mr. Newton.

"Well, there were Abraham Lincoln, James A. Garfield, and William McKinley," replied Larry.

"Is there anyone in your family with either of those names?"

"Let me see—of course—there's Jimmy—James. But why do they refer to him?"

"That's the point," replied Mr. Newton, "why do they? I wish they had not."

"Why?"

"Because this looks as if they meant to make trouble, and force you to do what they want. It is nothing more nor less than a threat to kidnap your little brother."

"Kidnap Jimmy?"

"That's what they practically threaten unless you sign the deed."

"But how can they kidnap persons in New York, with so many police around?"

"Haven't you read enough in the papers of late how it is done?" answered Mr. Newton. "It is very easy, especially for some Italian gang. I would be on my guard if I were you, and tell

your mother to have an eye out for Jimmy at all times. But don't scare her."

"What good would it do if they did take Jimmy?"

"You'd find out soon enough," answered Mr. Newton. "How long do you suppose you would refuse to sign, or your mother—how long do you think she would refrain from signing, if she knew by doing so she could get Jimmy back? We are fighting a desperate gang, I'm afraid, and we'll have to be on our guard. Be careful of every move, be suspicious of all strangers, and keep a lookout for the blue-handed man."

"Can't we notify the police?"

"Oh, we could, but it would be worse than useless. In the first place we have nothing but suspicions and vague threats. The police could not act on them. Besides you couldn't have a bluecoat detailed to watch Jimmy all the while."

"I wonder what we had better do," mused Larry, who was much alarmed over the turn things had taken.

"We have several days yet," said Mr. Newton. "They give us a week to make up our minds. In that time something may turn up. We've done enough work for to-night. Let's rest until to-morrow."

So, with his brain filled with thoughts of the possibility of Jimmy's being kidnapped, and pondering over the strange web he was being tangled up in, Larry went home.

CHAPTER XXI

THE GAS EXPLOSION

It was with no very easy mind that Larry started for work next morning. Before he left for the office he warned his mother to keep her eye on Jimmy.

"What for?" asked Mrs. Dexter.

"Because there's been a lot of automobile accidents in the streets lately," replied Larry. "I don't want Jimmy to get hurt."

"I can beat an auto running!" cried the little fellow, who overheard his brother's warning.

"Well, you'd better not try it," said Larry. "You might win the first time, if the auto wasn't going very fast, but the next time the machine would beat you, Jimmy, and knock you down, and roll you over in the mud, and, maybe, if it was a very bad auto, it would make your nose bleed."

"Then I'll be careful," promised Jimmy, with rather a frightened look on his face. "I'll stay close to the house."

Satisfied that he had frightened him sufficiently to make his little brother keep his promise Larry went to work. All the morning, however, his thoughts were more on the threatening cipher he

had received, and on the possibility of Jimmy being kidnapped, than they were on his assignments. Every time the reporters came in from police headquarters Larry was afraid lest they bring in a story of a little boy having been stolen.

But, as the morning wore on, and there was no bad news, Larry began to feel more relieved, and he began to think the threat was an idle one, after all. Still, he recalled that the week was not yet up. He found a chance to talk with Mr. Newton in the course of the day.

"Don't you think I'd better agree to sign the deed?" he asked.

"What's the matter, getting frightened about that cipher?" asked Mr. Newton.

"A little."

"Well, Larry, I don't want you to do anything you will worry over. If you think you had better play into the hands of the gang, in order to prevent the possibility of them kidnapping your brother, don't let me stop you. All you have to do is to insert a notice to that effect in the papers. They are probably watching for it."

"Do you honestly think they'll try to kidnap Jimmy?" asked Larry.

"No, I don't. It would be a pretty serious thing for them to do, mixed up as they are in other crimes. I don't believe Jimmy is in any danger."

"Then I'll not sign," decided Larry. "I'll show them I'm not afraid!"

It was shortly after one o'clock, and the first edition had gone to press. There had not been much news, local or foreign, since morning, and the reporters and editors were taking it a little easy.

It was a warm afternoon in early September, and the haze in the air indicated the approach of a storm.

"It would be just like something to break loose now," observed one of the reporters, who was lazily lounging on a table, puffing at a corncob pipe. "It was just like this one afternoon when that big railroad wreck occurred. We thought we were never going to get any news that day, when all at once we had more than we could handle. That's always the way when——"

"Boom!" A dull but powerful explosion sounded through the open windows, startling the reporters, and causing the one who was speaking to break off suddenly in his talk.

"Something went up that time," exclaimed Mr. Newton.

"Are they blasting anywhere around here?" asked the city editor.

"No," several replied. "That's an explosion of some sort. Can't be down at one of the forts, as it sounded too near."

"Look out that window!" exclaimed Larry, pointing at one that opened on the north side of the office. "See the smoke!"

A dark pall of vapor, like an immense cloud,

overhung a portion of the city, seemingly about a mile away from the office.

"It's one of the gas tanks!" cried Mr. Newton.

Just then the automatic fire alarm in the office, which was connected with the regular city system, began to tap the bell with quick, impatient strokes. There was dead silence in the room while all counted the number of the box.

"It's 313!" exclaimed a reporter. "That's the gas works—private box!"

"Newton, you and Larry with Smith and Robinson, jump out on that, quick!" exclaimed Mr. Emborg, grabbing for the telephone on his desk. "Phone the story in!" he added. "We'll get out an extra if we have to!"

While he was giving these orders, which the four reporters, including Larry, obeyed at once, the city editor was getting into communication with the art department on the floor below.

"Send a photographer up to the gas works!" he called. "Big explosion there. Try and get a picture for the last edition!"

He hung up the receiver with a bang.

"Anderson, you get ready to take the story over the telephone!" Mr. Emborg went on. "You'll have to grind it out lively!"

Anderson got several pencils ready, arranged his typewriter with a long roll of paper in it, to avoid the necessity of changing sheets when he began to write, and sat down in front of a telephone that was in a booth, where a small table

offered a chance to write out the notes he would take when the story began coming in.

"Jackson, call someone on the 'phone near the gas works, and see if you can get a line on how bad it is. We'll issue a bulletin. Sneadly, get ready to call up the City and St. Elmo's hospitals as soon as the victims have had a chance to get there. There's where they'll probably take 'em, because they are the nearest places."

In a few minutes what had been a quiet office was transformed into a hive of activity. The reporters were assigned to their tasks, and those in the city room stood with tense nerves waiting for the first news that might tell of a frightful disaster. Mr. Emborg, like a general planning for battle, had posted all his forces where they could do the best and quickest work.

Suddenly Jackson, who had gone to the 'phone to call up someone near the scene, cried out:

"It's a bad one, all right!"

"Who are you talking with?" asked Mr. Emborg.

"I've got a party on the wire who lives about a block away. He says all the windows in the neighborhood are broken."

"I don't care for the windows!" broke in Mr. Emborg. "What do they amount to? Is anyone killed? Find that out, if you can, and tell what happened."

Jackson listened to what the man at the other end of the wire was saying. Then he called out:

"Some men were cleaning out a tank that had been emptied of gas! Some gas leaked in, and the thing went up! He says he saw a number of bodies thrown away up into the air, and the report is that seven men are killed."

Before Jackson had ceased speaking Mr. Emborg was writing out a bulletin to be posted outside the office, giving a mere statement of the accident, and announcing that details would be found in the next issue of the *Leader*.

An instant later the telephone rang again.

"Answer that, Anderson!" the city editor exclaimed. "That's probably Newton on the wire. Write fast, tell him to talk fast, and make short sentences. We only have a few minutes for the second edition."

The city editor proved to be a good guesser. It was Mr. Newton at the other end of the wire, and he had a partial story.

Briefly told, the accident was that a dozen men went into one of the big gas-holders to clean from the bottom an accumulation of oil that prevented a free flow of the vapor from the outlet pipe. Before the men entered through a small manhole in the top, all the gas had been drawn off.

That is, it was supposed all the vapor was out, but more either leaked in, or some was generated by the oil in the bottom of the holder. At any rate there was some vapor in the tank. One of the men was using his shovel to scrape some of the dirt from the sides of the holder, when his

implement must have struck sparks from the iron side of the tank.

There was a terrific explosion that tore the big tank apart as if it was made of paper, and the dozen men inside were hurled high into the air when the top blew off.

As soon as possible men from other parts of the works ran to aid the unfortunates. Six of the men had fallen back into the tank, and were lying on the bottom. Four had been scattered about the yard, two badly wounded, and two dead.

It was this scene that confronted Larry, Mr. Newton, and the other reporters when they reached the gas plant. A big crowd had collected, summoned by the sound of the explosion, the sight of the big smoke-cloud, and the rush of the fire apparatus. For the latter there was no need, as after the first terrible burst of flame from the tank, there was no more blaze.

However, the firemen with their ladders were soon called on for service. The two wounded men, who had been picked up and carried into the office, were now hurried to the hospital in the police ambulances that had answered the alarm.

"We must get those men out of the tank!" the foreman of the works cried. "There may be some alive!"

A score of men sprang forward as volunteers.

"Bring the ladders!" shouted the chief of the

fire department, who always responded to an alarm from the gashouse district.

The firemen ran up with them. Two were placed against the outside of the tank. Up them swarmed several of the "smoke-eaters," as the firemen are sometimes called. They were preparing to lower other ladders down on the inside when they were forced to come away because of the gas fumes.

Only for a little while, though, did they falter. Coming down they got their smoke-masks, made of fine wire sieves, with damp sponges placed in them. With these over their faces they prepared to brave death to rescue the men who might yet remain alive in the tank.

Down into the shattered holder they went, half a dozen brave men. Into the slimy black oil on the bottom they dropped. Then, working quickly, that they might not be overcome by the fumes that still continued to accumulate in the tank, each fireman shouldered one of the unconscious forms. There was no way of telling the living from the dead until they were carried up, and then down the ladders to the ground.

Swarming up the rungs with their burdens the six firemen came. When they reappeared over the edge of the tank they were met with a loud cheer.

CHAPTER XXII

A FAMILY HEIRLOOM

DOWN to the ground the hapless burdens were carried. Doctors who had been summoned bent hastily over the motionless forms. Coats and jackets, dirty from the oil, were torn open, and skillful hands felt to see if hearts still beat.

"This one's alive! Hurry him to the hospital!" cried a physician. The man was placed in an ambulance, which set off, the horse galloping swiftly.

The other five were past human aid, having been either burned to death in the sudden rush of flame, or suffocated as they fell back into the holder.

"There were twelve men working in the tank!" cried the superintendent of the works, hurrying up to the chief of the fire department. "We have found only ten. Where are the other two?"

A hurried search was made for the missing men. Larry joined in, as did Mr. Newton. There were several piles of lumber in the yard about the tanks, and behind one of these the bodies of the two unfortunate men were found. One was still breathing, and was hurried to the hospital. The other had expired.

While these things had been going on Mr. Newton was not idle. As soon as he got any facts he ran to a telephone, and sent them in to the office, where Anderson was waiting for them. Larry, Smith, and Robinson aided in collecting the facts, sometimes turning them over to Mr. Newton, or telephoning them in themselves, if he was busy.

In this way the information of how the accident occurred was obtained, and from officials in the office of the works the names of the men were secured. Meanwhile there were busy times in the *Leader* city room.

Waiting until he had a fairly good and connected account of the accident, Anderson sat down to a typewriter, and began grinding out copy. He was a fast operator, and the way his fingers flew over the keys was a sight to behold. In short, crisp sentences, but in words that made a thrilling story, he rattled out the account.

Near him stood Mr. Emborg. As fast as Anderson had a paragraph written the city editor would pull out the paper, and clip off what was written. Meantime Anderson, as soon as the paper ceased moving, went on writing.

Mr. Emborg quickly edited the copy, and gave it to one of the messenger boys, who ran with it to the pneumatic tube that sent it to the composing room. There men who operated the typesetting machines stood ready to set up the story.

The reporter who had been detailed to call up

the hospitals was soon in communication with them. He learned of the condition of the men as soon as the doctors had made an examination. One man died as he was being carried in. These facts were rapidly told to Anderson, who wove them into his story. When part of the account had been written, and sent to the composing room Mr. Emberg began making a heading for the story.

It was to be a "horse head," with plenty of black type, and covering a good section of the page. When part of this was written it was sent upstairs, and the editor continued to write out the remainder. Thus not a second was lost.

In less than three-quarters of an hour from the time the explosion happened, the *Leader* was out on the street with a very good account of the accident. In fact, before the firemen had come away, having brought up from the tank the last body, newsboys were selling copies of the paper containing the story of the terrible happening, about the scene. It was good and quick work.

By this time the photographer sent to make a view of the wrecked tank had returned to the office, having made several exposures. In the dark-room the plates were developed. Prints were made. Then they were re-photographed; the other plates were put through a process, and the thin film that contains the image was removed from the glass, and put on a zinc plate.

Acids were poured over this, and by the use of

certain chemicals the image on the film was transferred to the zinc plate. This was quickly made ready, and mounted on a lead block.

It was now almost time for the last edition. The story of the accident had been made much longer, for Larry, Mr. Newton, Smith, and Robinson were sending in new details. They were quickly set up, and the type was placed in the forms. The picture was also put into the place it was to occupy on the front page.

Then the form was covered with wet *papier-maché*, which was pressed into the type while soft, and baked on by means of steam, under a heavy weight. When the "matrix," as it is called, being a piece of cardboard with an exact reproduction of every letter in the type, or every line in the picture, was ready, it was rushed to the stereotyping department. There a lead plate, curved in a half-circle, was made from it, and this plate, with a dozen others, each one representing a page of the *Leader*, was clamped onto the presses.

The machinery was adjusted, and the press started, the papers being printed at the rate of many thousands an hour. Thus the last edition came out, about two hours after the accident, with a picture of the scene, and the exploded tank. It was up-to-date newspaper work.

"Well, I guess we've done about all we can to-day," remarked Mr. Newton, addressing his helpers. "We've covered everything I can think

of. I guess we beat some of the other papers. Haven't seen any of them around here yet."

"It certainly was a bad accident," remarked Larry, who had never before seen such a terrible one.

"This isn't so much," spoke Smith. "You should have seen the one over on the Jersey meadows, when nineteen were killed by the train in the fog."

"That's right," replied Robinson. "That was something of an accident."

"I don't want to see any worse than this," said Larry. "This will last me for a while."

"Shall we go back now?" asked Smith.

"I guess so," responded Mr. Newton. "Tell you what you might do, Larry: get an interview with the head of the gas company. We can work it in to-morrow. Ask him how he accounts for the accident, have him explain how the gas could leak into the tank, and how a spark could be struck. It will be a good feature, if you can get him to talk."

So, while the others went back to the *Leader* office, Larry prepared to get an interview with the president of the gas concern. He inquired of the superintendent of the place, and found that the man he wanted to see was a Mr. Reynolds. Learning where his office was located, Larry went there.

When he told the messenger who was stationed in the president's anteroom that he was from the

Leader, the messenger grinned, as much as to remark that the president would not see reporters. But the lad came back with the information that Larry would be given a short interview. He was ushered into the president's office.

As soon as he caught a glimpse of him Larry wondered where he had seen Mr. Reynolds before. Then it came back to him. This was the gentleman who had lost the valuable jewels which Larry had found hidden in the vacant lot one night. Mr. Reynolds, who was a rich banker, as well as head of the gas company, had paid Larry one thousand dollars reward for recovering the gems.

"I ought to remember him," thought Larry.

"Well, what can I do for you?" asked Mr. Reynolds, in gruff tones, quite different, Larry thought, from the manner he had used in thanking him for the recovery of the jewels.

The young reporter asked the questions Mr. Newton had suggested, and was given answers that explained how the explosion occurred. Mr. Reynolds claimed that it was no fault of the gas concern, and stated that the families of the victims would be provided for.

"It was a terrible occurrence," said Mr. Reynolds, "and we regret it as much as anyone. We try to take every safeguard for our employees, but accidents will happen, sometimes, in spite of all our care."

Larry asked a few more questions, and was

about to take his leave, when Mr. Reynolds, who had been looking at him rather sharply, inquired:

"Where have I seen you before, young man?"

"I brought back your jewels," replied Larry.

"Oh, yes, yes! So you did! I have been wondering where I saw you. Well, you didn't find any more of my diamonds, did you?"

"No," replied Larry. "Didn't you get them all back?"

"All of them," repeated Mr. Reynolds. "I was only joking. Though, to be exact, we did not get all of them back. The thieves kept a valuable heirloom."

"What was it?"

"It was a ring," replied Mr. Reynolds, "in the shape of a snake, coiled around three times. For eyes it had two rubies, and in the end of the tail was a diamond. It was not very costly, but I valued it for its associations. It had been in our family for over two hundred years, and I would like very much to have kept it."

"Then it wasn't in the box that I dug up?" asked Larry.

"No trace of it, though it was taken with the other things the thieves carried off. By the way, they never found those thieves, did they?"

"No," replied Larry.

"I suppose one of them took a fancy to my ring, and wore it himself, instead of hiding it with the rest of the booty," mused Mr. Reynolds.

"Well, if you ever should happen to come across

it, and you might, for you're a lucky lad, I'll pay you five hundred dollars."

"I'd be glad to find it for you without the reward," Larry said. "But I'm afraid there's little hope."

"Not much, I guess," agreed Mr. Reynolds. "Now is there anything more you'd like to know about this terrible explosion?"

"I guess I have everything I need," answered the young reporter. "I'm much obliged to you."

"Not at all," responded Mr. Reynolds. "I find it pays better to be perfectly frank with the newspapers. They'll find things out, anyhow, and you might as well tell them first, and get it in right."

Larry went back to the office, where he wrote up his interview with Mr. Reynolds, in readiness for the next day's paper. Then he went home.

"I wonder if Jimmy's been kidnapped," thought the boy, as he neared his house. In the excitement over the explosion he had forgotten, for a while, the threats the gang had made.

CHAPTER XXIII

MYSTERIOUS NOTES

LARRY was quite relieved when he got to the house, and found that nothing unusual had occurred. He was tired from the day's work, and his mind was full of the terrible scenes he had witnessed. Soon after supper he went to bed.

Larry's room opened out on a fire-escape. As it was warm he had his window open, though it made the room more noisy. Several times during the night he thought he heard someone moving on the escape near his room, but he was too sleepy to get up and make an investigation.

"If it's burglars they'll not get much here," he thought, as he turned over, and went to sleep again.

Larry awoke with a strange feeling that something had happened. It was as if he had dreamed a nightmare, the thoughts of which still lingered with him. At first he thought it might be a foreboding that Jimmy had been captured by the gang during the night. He jumped out of bed, but, as he did so, he heard his brother's voice in the next room and knew that the little chap was safe.

"It's all nonsense," thought Larry to himself,

as he began to dress. "I'm thinking too much about this. I'm getting to be as nervous and fidgety as a girl. I must go to work, and forget all about it."

He walked over to the bureau for his collar. As he picked it up his attention was attracted by a piece of paper pinned to the bureau cover.

"That's queer," he remarked, "I don't remember putting that there. I wonder if I'm beginning to walk in my sleep, and write notes to myself."

He unpinned the paper. It was folded several times, and when Larry had opened it, he saw printed in large letters this message:

"FOUR DAYS MORE. BLUE HAND."

Larry did not disguise from himself the fact that he was frightened. That the gang had not given up the matter, but was acting along the lines the members had laid down, seemed certain. It showed also that they were keeping close watch of the time, and of Larry's movements.

"That must have been what the noises were I heard out on the roof," Larry mused, as he finished dressing. "They are certainly a bold band to come into my room at night, and pin this here. They ran the risk of being taken for burglars, and, though I haven't a revolver to shoot, someone who saw them on the fire-escape might put a bullet into them."

That he was being watched by a desperate gang, who had possession of his deed, and who would go to almost any length to accomplish their purpose, Larry had no doubt. He felt more than ever the necessity of guarding his little brother, yet he did not know how to do it.

To speak to his mother, Larry felt, would only cause her so much alarm that it might make her ill, as her health was not very good. As for Jimmy he was too small to appreciate his danger, even if he had been told. The only thing to do was to make him believe in the danger of automobiles, and have him keep close to the house.

Yet even that might count for little, seeing that the members of the gang had shown that they did not fear to enter the house, giving no warning.

"I wonder what I'd better do?" thought Larry, conscious of the feeling that it was no easy task to be a lad pitted against a powerful band of men bent on doing him injury. "I'm almost willing to sign the deed, and let them have the property for the money they'll give. Of course, it is nothing like what I believe it to be worth, but it would save a lot of trouble."

So convinced, at first, was he that this would be the best plan, that, before he finished dressing, he sat down, and began to write out an advertisement to "Blue Hand," that he could put in the paper to give notice the deed would be signed.

"No! I'll not do it!" decided Larry, suddenly. "I'll fight 'em. We'll see if they'll dare to do as

they say. I'm at a disadvantage, but I'll do my best to get ahead of those fellows. I'll not give in until they do something worse than leave notes in my room, anyhow."

Then, feeling better, now that he had made up his mind to fight, Larry finished dressing, and went to breakfast, as if getting mysterious notes during the night was not unusual.

Larry's first assignment when he reached the office was to get an account of a wedding that had occurred the night before. There are two assignments reporters hate to cover, weddings and obituaries, and Larry, in his brief experience, had come to feel much as did all other members of his profession about these things. But, just as a reporter never shrinks from danger in getting a story for his paper (if he is a real reporter, and not a pretended one), so none of them ever "kick," at least to their city editor, when they get a disagreeable assignment.

Larry started off to get the wedding, which was that of persons fairly well known, or else the *Leader* never would have sent for it. Usually some of the women reporters on the paper attended to these society affairs, but at that time one of the women was away on vacation, and the other had double work to do, so the men had to help out, and much grumbling there was in consequence.

"I don't see what people want to get married for," thought Larry, as he walked along the

street where the house of the bride was located. "At least if they do, I don't see why they want it in the papers. I'd rather cover an Anarchist meeting, than go where a lot of women will tell how the bride looked, and what she wore."

Thus talking to himself, Larry walked along, forgetting in his sense of injury to take note of the numbers of the houses. Suddenly his feet slid out from under him, and he went down on the sidewalk rather hard.

He had stepped into a lot of rice that covered the flags for quite a distance, the small kernels making the stones very slippery. Larry picked himself up, and looked about to see if his undignified arrival in a sitting position had been observed by anyone. The street seemed deserted.

"I guess this is where the wedding was," he said. "This is some of the rice they threw at the bride for good luck. It was bad luck for me, though. Well, here goes," and with that Larry walked up the steps, which were white with kernels, and rang the bell.

To the girl who opened the door Larry stated his errand; that he had come to get an account of the wedding.

"Come in," said the servant, a good-natured-looking Irish girl. "Did you hurt yourself?"

"You mean just now?"

"Yes, when you fell," and she began to laugh at Larry.

"Oh," said the reporter, blushing at the re-

membrance of his fall, "no, I guess not. Did you see me?"

"I was at the window," said the girl. "I couldn't help laughing, you went down so sudden."

"Well, I didn't get a letter or a telegram to say it was about to happen, that's a fact," admitted Larry, joining in the girl's merriment.

"Come in," said the maid; "none of the family is up yet, but I guess Miss Clarice will soon be down, and she'll give you all the particulars. It was a sweet wedding, to be sure, and the bride looked lovely."

"Um," grunted Larry, beneath his breath. He was not particularly fond of lovely brides. He was shown into a large parlor, back of which was a drawing-room, and both apartments bore evidences of the previous night's gayeties. Flowers were strewn about the floor, and there was rice over everything, while a number of old shoes were in one corner.

"We haven't cleaned up yet," the girl said. "It was three o'clock when we got to bed."

She left Larry sitting alone in the darkened parlor, while she went about her duties. Larry sat there for half an hour. Then he began to get nervous.

"I wonder if they've forgotten all about me," thought the young reporter. "I've got something else to do besides sitting here waiting for someone to come, and tell me about a wedding."

He gave a loud cough, to attract the attention of anyone who might be within hearing.

"Oh, how you frightened me!" exclaimed a voice, and a tall, dark, and exceedingly pretty girl came into the room. "I didn't know anyone was here."

"I'm from the *Leader*," said Larry, rising. "I came about the wedding."

"Oh, are you a real, truly reporter?" asked the girl.

"Well, I think I can say I am," replied Larry.

"Oh, I've always wanted to see a real reporter," the girl went on. "It must be a grand life. Think of seeing terrible fires, and big accidents, and writing about murders, and suicides, and battles, and sudden death, and—and all sorts of horrible, scary things! Oh, I would love to be a reporter, only papa will not hear of it. Did you ever see a drowned man?"

"Several," replied Larry, wondering what kind of a girl this was.

"Oh, how lovely! And did you ever see a real, live, truly, really murderer?"

"Well, I have seen men in the Tombs, accused of murder, though they had not been convicted yet."

"Oh, how perfectly fascinating! I must get papa to let me be a reporter."

"About this wedding," began Larry. "Could you——"

"Oh, don't let's talk about weddings," inter-

rupted the girl. "They're horrid, stupid things. Tell me something about what you report. And to think I've seen a real reporter, just as I've always wanted to."

Larry agreed with her statement about weddings being stupid affairs, but he felt he was sent to get an account of one, and not to talk about himself. He was a little uncertain how to proceed.

"Were you ever at a fire?" the girl went on.

"Several times," replied Larry. "What is the bride's name, if you please?"

"Did the walls fall and crush anyone?" asked Larry's questioner, paying no attention to what he said.

"I think so. Can you tell me the groom's name?"

"Were you ever in an explosion, Mr. Reporter?"

"Well, close to one, once. Now about this wedding. I wish——"

"Show me how you write stories," the girl went on. "I think it must be perfectly lovely to write things for the paper? Do you think I could?"

"I guess so," replied Larry, in desperation. He did not know what to do, and did not wish to offend the girl, who was very pretty, and seemed much in earnest in her questions. But help came from an unexpected quarter.

"Why, Clarice!" exclaimed a woman's voice,

as she came into the room. "I have been looking everywhere for you. What are you doing?"

"I am giving the reporter from the *Leader* an account of the wedding," replied Clarice, with a smile.

"How far have you gone with it?" asked her mother. "If you do as you usually do, you have asked more questions than you have answered."

"I was only asking about a reporter's life," spoke the girl. "It's perfectly lovely. They see murdered people——"

"Clarice, you must not talk so!" exclaimed her mother. "Now, you run upstairs, and I'll tell the young man about the wedding."

Pouting a little the girl went out, nodding and smiling at Larry. The bride's mother then gave the young reporter a story of the ceremony.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CIRCUS

LARRY got along all right as far as taking the name of the bride, that of the groom, the officiating minister, and the attendants at the wedding ceremony was concerned. But when he came to take notes of the kinds of material in the dresses and the styles, he found himself helplessly at sea.

"The bride's dress was cut *en traine*," said Mrs. Loftus, the mother of the young woman who had been married.

"I didn't catch that about her dress being cut by a train," said Larry.

Mrs. Loftus laughed.

"Oh, you poor boy!" she exclaimed. "It's a shame to send you after a wedding. They ought to have a woman to describe the dresses. I don't wonder things get in the paper wrong. Who could expect a man to tell about a woman's dress? But I'll explain it to you."

Then she kindly initiated Larry into the mysteries of the feminine styles. She told him *en traine* meant that the dress had what old-fashioned persons called a "long trail," which swept on the ground. She also told him how to spell such words as "mousselaine," "peau de soie,"

"crêpe de Chine," and other terms that described the different materials.

With her help Larry did not make out so badly as he feared he would at first, but he was glad when he had all the facts, and could go back to the office to write them up. On his way out he saw Clarice peering over the balustrade at him.

"Good-by, Reporter!" she called, with a merry laugh, and Larry, though not knowing exactly what to make of her questions, thought she was one of the nicest girls he had ever seen.

He managed to turn out an account of the wedding, though it was not a very good one in his estimation. But Mr. Emberg did not seem to be very particular about it.

"Hurry through with that, Larry," he said. "I have something else for you."

So Larry finished by telling how the bridal couple had gone on a trip South, and turned his copy in at the city desk.

"I'm up now," he said, that being the reporter's expressive way of notifying the city editor or his assistant that he is ready for another assignment.

"I want you to go up to Madison Square Garden," said Mr. Emberg. "The circus has come to town, and I want a good descriptive story of how the animals got in, what the men are doing in the way of getting the Garden into shape, something about the freaks, and whatever else you see of interest. Make it a sort of special yarn, and do your best."

That was an assignment any reporter would have been pleased to get, for though some of the older men had done it for years, and there remained little or nothing that was new in it, still the spirit of the boy seemed to linger in them, and there were always plenty who were eager for the chance to "write up" the circus.

Larry appreciated his chance, and determined to do his best. He soon arrived at the Garden, and found the place in great confusion. Hundreds of men were scattered about the huge place. Some were erecting the tiers of seats, others were constructing the rings or stages on which the performers would appear; while high in the air, near the roof of the immense amphitheater, men, looking like spiders, were in a web of ropes, adjusting the trapezes.

In one corner was a group of tumblers and acrobats going through their "stunts," to keep in practice, for the show was to open in two days. On some of the trapezes the men and women were swinging about, and in one section of the Garden a troupe of Japanese contortionists and balancers were doing seemingly impossible feats.

As Larry watched he saw a man in pink tights come out of a dressing-room, followed by several of the circus helpers. The performer went to where a trapeze swung high in the air. From the cross-bar there dangled a rope, which the man in tights grasped. Larry was near enough to overhear what was being said.

"I'm going to give 'em something new," he remarked to a man with a long whip, who seemed to be a ringmaster.

"What is it?" asked the man with the whip.

"Watch me, and you'll see."

Then the one in pink tights went up the rope hand over hand, with an ease that seemed surprising to Larry, who had often tried the thing at Campton, in his father's barn, when, with other country boys, he had played circus.

Reaching the trapeze, the man sat down on the bar, and began to swing to and fro. He seemed to be adjusting the ropes. Then he turned over backward, and swung by his knees, head downward. Working his body back and forth he caused the trapeze to sway rapidly to and fro, in a long swing.

For several minutes this went on, until the trapeze was moving backward and forward, with its human burden, as far as possible.

Suddenly the man in pink tights gave a loud cry just as he reached the highest point in a backward swing. Then, to Larry's horror, and seemingly no less to the astonishment of the ringmaster and the helpers, the man was seen shooting downward, as if the ropes of the trapeze had broken. Larry was sure the man would be killed.

But, just when it seemed that the man's head would strike the ground, and he be terribly injured, the ropes suddenly became taut, and the performer's downward course was checked,

though he continued to swing back and forth in large arcs.

All at once he straightened up, and lightly leaped from the cross-bar.

"What do you think of that for a hair-raiser?" he asked. "Won't that make 'em sit up and take notice some?"

"It sure will," replied the ringmaster. "I thought you were a goner. How did you manage that?"

"I had the ropes on both sides shortened by a series of slip-knots," the man in pink tights explained. "Then, when I was swinging good and hard, I yanked the cord that held the first two knots in place. The weight of my body pulled the others out, and the rope began to lengthen, and you saw me come down. I had it calculated so that I would cease falling a little ways from the ground."

"It's a good trick," commented the ringmaster.

Larry thought so, too, and wondered how men cared to risk their lives in such dangerous performances. If the rope should break when the man's descent was so suddenly checked, he would surely be killed.

Larry saw about all there was going on among the performers, and decided next to visit the animal quarters. There he found a very lively place indeed. Some of the cages of wild beasts had just arrived from the train on which the circus came to New York, having been out on the road.

The big wagons, containing lions, tigers, leopards, hyenas, giraffes, hippopotami, snakes, monkeys, bears, and other denizens of the forest, plain, or desert were rolled into place, either by horses pulling them, or by the elephants pushing them.

Larry was quite surprised to see how these huge and seemingly unwieldy and clumsy creatures were made to perform hard work. They were useful as well as being ornamental, from a showman's standpoint. Putting their big heads against a wagon or truck that would take the strength of eight horses, one elephant would shove it into place with ease, two men at the tongue directing its course.

Larry found the head animal man, who gave the young reporter some facts to use in his story for the paper, and related a few incidents of the recent trip.

While the cage of lions was being put into place there came from it a terrifying roar. It seemed to shake the very ground.

"Old Nero isn't feeling in the best of spirits," said the animal trainer. "He's got a bad tooth that pains him, and he's as ugly as they come. I hope nothing happens. If he got out——" The showman shrugged his shoulders in a way that told more than words.

"Look out, there!" he cried, suddenly, to the men who were guiding the pole of the cage containing Nero. "You'll run into that post if you

don't look out. There you go! Call to that elephant to stop pushing, somebody!" yelled the trainer, for a huge elephant was shoving the lion's cage into place.

The men at the guiding pole had slipped, and the cage was headed straight for a big iron pillar.

The next instant there was a crash of splintering wood, and the cage ran full tilt into the column.

"Lookout, everybody!" the trainer cried. "Nero's cage is open! Get the hot irons ready, in case he's loose!"

The elephant ceased pushing now, and backed up a few paces. From the cage came a roar more terrible than any that had preceded it, and, as if awakened by a call to battle, all the other wild beasts began to utter their cries, so that the Garden sounded like a section of a South African jungle.

Suddenly a tawny yellow streak shot out of the lion's cage, launched itself through the air, and landed on the elephant's back.

"Nero's out!" yelled the trainer. "Lay low, everybody!"

The roars of the maddened beast had turned to angry growls. It crouched low on the back of the huge elephant, sinking its claws into the brute's hide. The pachyderm trumpeted loudly in pain and terror.

A group of trainers and helpers huddled to-

gether in a space made by several cages. The men were afraid to run, for fear of attracting the attention of the lion to themselves.

"Here!" cried the head trainer. "I'll get the hot irons! If he comes this way fire this revolver at him. It's only got blanks in it, but it may scare him back to his cage. Only the door is broken. If we get him in we can scare him into remaining there."

Then throwing a big revolver down on the sawdust, the trainer ran to where the irons were heating. At that instant the lion leaped from the elephant's back, and came straight at the men. Not one stayed to see what would happen next, but fled in a hurry. Nor did anyone pick up the revolver.

Larry, who had been standing near the head trainer, saw the lion coming. His first thought was to flee, but he hardly knew which way to turn, as he had never been in the Garden before, and did not know where safety was. Then, hardly knowing what he was doing, Larry leaped forward, and grabbed the revolver. The lion was not twenty feet away, and was trotting straight at him, growling menacingly.

"Fire at him! Fire at him!" cried the head trainer, who was at the far side of the quarters. He had grabbed two hot irons from the furnace, where they were kept in readiness for just such emergencies.

The lion, seeing the boy standing in front of

him, crouched for a spring. Larry's heart was beating like a triphammer, and his hand trembled so he could hardly hold the revolver.

Then, like a streak of sunshine, the beast leaped for him.

CHAPTER XXV

THE LAST WARNING

“CRACK!”

Larry fired the revolver. It was an automatic one, and all he had to do was to pull the trigger. Right at the face of the lion he aimed it, as the animal was in the air above him.

“Crack! Crack! Crack!”

Streaks of fire from the heavy cartridges shot in the direction of the beast.

“Crack!”

It was the last shot. As he fired it Larry leaped to one side to escape the lion's claws. Then he cast the revolver at the beast, and fled.

But there was no need of this. Cowed by the streaks of flame, and the noise of the reports, the brute, who had been only slightly wounded, had no sooner landed on the sawdust, than, with tail between its legs, it started back toward the cage it had left.

“Chase after him, some of you fellows!” shouted the head trainer. “His nerve's gone now. That boy has more sense and grit than the whole lot of you!”

Now that the danger was practically over, the attendants ran back, and toward the lion's wagon.

The brute, though still growling and roaring, had leaped into its broken cage, where it stood crouching in one corner.

"Quick, now; wheel another cage up in front of the broken one!" the trainer exclaimed. "That will hold him until we can fix his."

This was soon done, and all further danger was past.

"I'm much obliged to you," the trainer said, coming up to Larry, having taken the hot irons back. "It was a nervy bit of work."

"I guess if I'd stopped to think I'd never have done it," replied Larry.

"That's all right, my lad, and it was well done, just the same. If Nero had gotten loose, the way he's feeling now, and once got the taste of human blood, there's no telling what might have happened."

The trainer drew a pad from his pocket, and wrote a few lines on it, handing the paper to Larry.

"What's this?" asked the reporter.

"It's a pass for you and any friend you want to bring along, to come and see the show," the trainer replied. "It's good for two box seats at any performance, and as often as you like to come."

"I don't believe I'd better take it," said Larry. "I didn't stop the lion for pay, and besides the office might not like it."

"Don't let that worry you," responded the

trainer. "I know what you mean; you don't want to 'graft' the way a lot of fellows do who think they're newspaper men. But that is all right. A real newspaper man never grafts, but this pass isn't graft. We always send the newspapers lots of tickets, anyhow. It's part of our advertising contract. This is simply an extra one for yourself, as a sort of recognition for what you did, though it doesn't begin to pay for the trouble you saved us."

"If you think it's all right I'll take it," Larry answered.

"Of course it is. Come to the show, and see Nero go through his paces."

Men by this time had come up to repair the broken cage, and with a nod of farewell, the trainer left Larry, as there were many things to attend to toward getting the circus into shape. Larry wandered about the big Garden, seeing odd little incidents that he made use of in his newspaper story.

He found the manager in charge of the freaks, and introducing himself, Larry started to ask if there was anything new that might make a story.

"Well, yes, here is a little item you might work in," replied the manager, looking at Larry in what the reporter thought was a strange sort of way. "We've a romance on our hands."

"A romance?"

"Yes, you see the living skeleton has gone and fallen in love with the fat woman."

"Really?" asked Larry, thinking the manager might be trying to "string" him.

"Of course. Come out and have a talk with him. But that isn't the worst. You see, the fat lady is smitten with the India rubber man, and the bearded lady has gone and fallen in love with the living skeleton, so you see, things are all mixed up. Come out into the freak room, and see for yourself."

Wondering whether to believe the story or not, Larry followed the manager. He found the freaks all sitting in one corner of the Garden, on a sort of raised platform. Sure enough the living skeleton was gazing with a sort of lorn expression at the fat lady, who, in turn, was making eyes at the India rubber gentleman, who was practicing stretching his neck until the skin of it almost touched his forehead. The bearded lady, who was combing her whiskers every now and then, glanced in the direction of the living skeleton, who was shivering, though the day was warm.

"You can see for yourself," spoke the manager, in a whisper. "Don't make fun of 'em, if you write it up."

"I'll be careful," replied Larry, thinking he had found something that would fit in the circus story very well.

Having about all the material he needed, and seeing that the hour was getting late, Larry decided to go back to the office. He found himself

in quite a crowd of men and boys who were hanging around the entrance to the Garden, as he came out. He thought he felt a hand in the side pocket of his coat, as he worked his way through the throng, but, as he knew he had nothing of value in it, he decided, even if it was a pickpocket, he would not stop then to try to capture him. So he pressed on. He was just in time to catch a car for the office, and gave the incident no further thought.

"Well, did you get a good story?" asked Mr. Emberg, as Larry entered the city room.

"Pretty good; one of the lions got loose."

"Don't let them work any press-agent yarns off on you," cautioned the city editor, with a smile, for he was used to such stories from circuses.

"This is true," replied Larry. "I saw it myself. In fact, I fired a revolver at Nero to drive him back."

"Was it Nero who was loose?" asked Mr. Newton, overhearing what Larry said.

"That's what they called him. He seemed ugly enough to be Nero."

"Then it's no fake, if you saw Nero loose," went on Mr. Newton. "He's the worst lion in captivity. That ought to be a good story."

"Why in the world didn't you telephone it in?" asked Mr. Emberg. "You might have been beaten by some of the early editions of the yellows. Hurry up, now, make that the feature of your story."

Somewhat chagrined over his failure to have appreciated the real news value of the lion incident, Larry began to turn out copy as fast as he could write. Mr. Emberg read it.

"You're doing all right!" he called to Larry. "It is as good a circus story as we've had in a long time. Keep it up."

Larry told of everything in connection with the escape of Nero, and then began to describe the different scenes, including the way the Garden was being made ready for the crowds. By this time the first edition had gone to press.

"Take your time, now," said the city editor. "We'll use the rest in the next edition."

"I've got a good story about the freaks," said Larry, and he began to tell of the mixed-up romance.

He was interrupted by a burst of laughter, in which several reporters and Mr. Emberg joined.

"It's true! I saw 'em myself," exclaimed Larry.

"Of course you did," admitted Mr. Emberg. "It was gotten up for your benefit. The manager sized you up for a new reporter, and thought the old story might go with you, though he must have known that no copy reader would have passed it."

"Isn't it true?" asked Larry, his faith in human nature somewhat shaken.

"It's one of the oldest press-agent's yarns that ever did duty in a circus," said Mr. Newton. "If

there were any freaks in the Ark, and they had a press agent, he told that story to the first reporter who interviewed him when Captain Noah's boat landed on Mount Ararat."

So Larry learned two things that day. One was that things old reporters think are fakes sometimes turn out to be true, and the other was that you can never believe a manager of the freak department of a circus. Both lessons were useful ones.

When he went out to lunch, Larry put his hand into the side pocket of his coat. He felt an envelope there, and thinking it was a letter which his mother might have given him to mail, and which he had forgotten, he pulled it out. He at once saw that it was no ordinary letter, for the envelope bore a large blue cross upon it.

"Where did that come from," thought Larry. He opened it. Inside was a small piece of paper, on which was printed:

THREE DAYS MORE. BLUE HAND.

"That was what the tugging at my coat in the crowd at the Garden meant," reasoned Larry. "Some one of the gang must have been close to me. They must be following me around, and keeping track of me wherever I go."

At first this thought alarmed him. It was unpleasant to feel that someone was always looking at you, knowing your every movement so well that they could slip up, and drop notes into

your pocket. Larry felt his courage leaving him. He half determined to agree to the gang's wishes. Then, as he thought of what Mr. Newton had said, he grew braver, and decided to fight to the end.

That night, going home, Larry was in quite a crowd on the elevated train. He tried to keep watch, and see if anyone dropped anything into his pockets, but the crowd was so dense that it would have been an easy matter for a person to approach him closely, and escape detection.

So Larry was not greatly surprised, when, on reaching the street, he found another missive, in the same language.

The same thing happened on two successive nights. Try as he did he could discover no one, however. He began to be quite nervous. A person who could steal up on him in a crowd, unknown to him, and drop letters into his pocket, was clearly a dangerous customer, Larry reasoned.

On Saturday night, as he left the train, he felt a suspicious tug at his coat pocket. He turned quickly, and caught a glimpse of a youth hurrying through the crowd.

"If that wasn't Peter Manton I'll eat my hat," thought Larry.

He drew out the letter, which, in accordance with his expectations, he found. It read:

THIS IS THE LAST WARNING.

CHAPTER XXVI

LARRY'S NARROW ESCAPE

SOMEHOW, instead of being frightened at receiving the ominous message thrust into his pocket in that mysterious manner, Larry felt a sense of relief.

"Well, I'm glad they're at the end of this warning business," he remarked to himself. "It was getting annoying. I'd rather do some real fighting, than all this sparring in the dark. If they're going to do something let 'em do it, and not be hinting at it all the time. The suspense is worse than anything else."

As Larry hurried toward his home he could not help feeling a little bit worried lest something had befallen Jimmy. The message seemed to indicate that the patience of the gang was exhausted, and that they would now proceed to act.

Consequently Larry felt much relieved when he reached home, and found his brother and all the others safe. He was tired with his day's work, and went to bed early.

As next day was Sunday Larry decided he would take Jimmy for a trip to Central Park, to see the animals, and find some shady nook where

he could take a rest, and make believe he was back in the country again.

Larry thought that it might also serve a good purpose in foiling any ideas the gang might have of kidnapping Jimmy on that day. On Sundays the children generally went for a walk alone, and Larry was afraid that if they did so on this occasion, advantage might be taken of the chance.

After breakfast Larry proposed the trip to Mary and Jimmy. Mrs. Dexter agreed to it, saying that if Larry would look after the younger children she and Lucy would go and visit a friend in Jersey City. Preparations for the trip were soon made, and Larry, with his brother and sister, started off, Mrs. Dexter and Lucy taking an opposite direction.

It was very fine in the park. The birds were singing in the trees, the sky was blue, and the grass was almost as nice as in the meadow in Campton, Larry thought.

"It's jest like the country!" exclaimed Jimmy, running, and turning a somersault on the turf, while Mary gave chase to a gray squirrel that seemed quite tame, and frisked about on the low branches of a tree.

With the children Larry wandered about in various shady places, now and then sitting down to rest. There was a large crowd in the park, for the day was warm.

"Let's go and see the elephants an' tigers," suggested Mary, her eyes growing big with won-

derment in anticipation of the delights of viewing the wild animals.

"All right," assented Larry, who, though he would not admit it, had a keen desire himself to see the beasts.

They amused themselves by throwing peanuts to the elephant, and Jimmy insisted on giving a share of his to the hippopotamus. The nuts were so small, and the animal's mouth so large, that it is doubtful if he even tasted them.

It was while standing watching the elephants that Larry became conscious that someone was observing him and the children rather closely. A little behind him, as he turned, he could see a short, stout man, who seemed to be much interested in the pachyderms.

Larry was sure this man had been staring at him, but, try as he did, the young reporter could not remember where he had seen him before. As he turned back to look once more at the elephants, Larry noticed that the man's eyes were turned toward Jimmy, who, in a new suit, was an attractive-looking little chap.

"I wonder if he's a kidnapper?" mused Larry, half inclined to laugh at his foolish fancies. "I must keep watch, and see if he follows us when we leave."

Larry gradually drew the children away from the elephant inclosure, and over to where the monkeys were housed. The reporter watched, but, though he was sure the man looked after

them, and noted where they went, he did not leave the spot where he was.

Mary and Jimmy found much to amuse them in the house of the primates. The funny antics of the monkeys kept the crowd in roars of laughter. Even Larry forgot about keeping his eye on Jimmy, and watched the odd contortions of the queer, half-human-looking beasts.

Once again, however, he became aware of that strange feeling of being under observation. Looking around, he saw the same man behind them. Larry had no doubt now but that the fellow was following them.

"Well, if he thinks that he's going to kidnap Jimmy right from under my nose, he'll find he's barking up the wrong tree!" exclaimed Larry, as he put his arm around his brother. "All the same, I guess we'd better get out of here. Some others of the blue-handed man's gang may be on the lookout for us, and I don't care to have a fight."

They walked about the park a little while longer, and then, as they were getting hungry, decided to start for home. When they boarded a car Larry looked all about to see if he had been followed. There was quite a throng of people, and the reporter, though he was not quite sure, thought he saw the man who had stood near him in the elephants' inclosure, and also in the monkey house. The man, if he was the same one, was accompanied by a boy about Larry's age.

"I'm almost sure that lad was Peter Manton," thought Larry. "There's something underhanded about this whole thing. I wish I could find out what it is, and break up the gang."

Larry, with the children, reached home before Mrs. Dexter and Lucy returned. As Mary and Jimmy were hungry, Larry began foraging in the cupboard to find something to give the youngsters.

As he took the cover off a dish in the pantry, to see what the receptacle contained, Larry saw a paper in it.

"That don't look good to eat," he remarked, as he unfolded it. He gave a start, as he saw a big blue cross on it, while, in bold characters, was printed:

DO NOT THINK WE HAVE FORGOTTEN.

"They've been here since we went away this morning," thought Larry. "They entered the rooms, and left this note. They must be keeping a close watch on the house, to know when we all go out, or else they would not venture to come in."

That night Larry called on Mr. Newton. He told the reporter all about the Sunday adventures, including that part about the man, and the finding of the note.

"Don't lose your courage," advised Mr. Newton. "It begins to look now as if they were only

bluffing. Maybe it was all a bluff. Still, don't be too careless."

"Then there's nothing we can do?" asked Larry, on whom the strain was beginning to tell.

"No, I think not."

Rather encouraged by the sensible view Mr. Newton took of it, Larry went home, and slept soundly—so soundly, in fact, that he did not get up in time, and was a little late at the office.

"Here's an assignment for you, Larry," called Mr. Emberg. "They're pulling down a big brick chimney at the old electric light power-station to-day. Going to loosen the base by dynamite, I understand. I want you to get a good story of it. I'll send a photographer with you to get a picture of it as it topples over."

Larry was soon on his way to the scene of the demolition, accompanied by the photographer. The chimney was a very tall one, and was considered unsafe, as part of the power-house had been destroyed by fire some time before.

Quite a crowd of persons were on hand to witness the operations, as word of what was intended had spread through the neighborhood. There were also several other reporters there, and one or two photographers. Larry found the foreman in charge of the work, and asked him to explain the plan, so as to get a good understanding of it when he should write the story. The foreman went into details about putting a small charge of dynamite under one corner of the stack.

"The force of dynamite is mainly downward," he stated. "But we think there will be enough upward power to the blast to gently tilt the chimney over to the east, where it will fall without doing any damage."

"What if it falls the other way, and crashes down on top of those low buildings?" asked Larry.

"We have it guyed up with ropes to prevent that," was the answer. "I guess there's no danger."

The preliminary work was almost finished, when a man, carrying a red flag, came out of a small shanty.

"There goes the dynamite," said Larry, to the picture man. "Now you'll see some fun, I am thinking."

The foreman made everyone move back out of harm's way. Most persons were glad enough to obey the request, but the reporters, including Larry, said if they had to stay so far back they could see nothing.

"But think of the risk you run," objected the foreman. "Some of you may be killed."

"We'll take the chance," replied several. "We want to be close by when the stack hits the ground, and so do the photographers."

The foreman interposed no more objections, but ordered the work to go on.

The reporters were gathered in a little group, and after talking matters over decided to move

toward a small tool shanty, that stood well to the left of the stack.

"There'll be no danger then," agreed Larry.

So the scribes went to the hut. The man with the red flag had placed the explosive at the bottom of the stack, and, seeing that everything was in readiness, waved his flag at a signal that he was about to touch off the fuse. At this sign of danger the crowd pressed farther back.

A thin spiral of smoke arose from the fuse. The man with the red flag ran off at top speed. From a window of the shanty the whole affair could be seen.

Suddenly there came a dull, rumbling sound, and the earth shook. Then a little cloud of bricks, mortar, and dust shot upward. Next the tall stack, the foundation of which had been weakened, began slowly to tilt over. As the foreman had desired, it was falling to the left.

Then all at once the stack seemed to hesitate. It appeared to be poised, like the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Next, as though the direction had been changed by a giant's hand, the chimney began falling toward the shanty.

"Those reporters will all be killed!" cried the foreman. "I warned them of the danger. Come out of that!" he yelled, as if they had a chance to obey. Swiftly the tower was coming nearer the earth.

Then, as suddenly as before, the direction of the fall was changed. The chimney, that had

been seemingly in one solid piece, broke in the center.

Down on top of the shack crashed the bricks and mortar. The corner of the shanty crumpled up like paper, just after most of the reporters had fled.

Larry, however, was not so fortunate. When the crash came he was in the far corner of the hut. The breaking and rending of timbers had formed a sort of archway above his head, and the blows from the bricks had been somewhat warded off. Larry had a most narrow escape from sudden death.

"Come on out!" called the other reporters to him, as the dust settled.

"I can't!" cried Larry, faintly.

CHAPTER XXVII

JIMMY IS MISSED

"WHAT's the matter, are you hurt?" asked one of the newspaper men.

"My foot is pinned down under a plank!" Larry exclaimed. "I don't believe I'm hurt much, unless it's a sprained ankle."

By this time several men engaged by the contractor to help raze the big stack came running up.

"We'll get you out!" the foreman cried. "Heave away, boys!"

The laborers heaved away with right good will, and soon had tossed aside the planks that held Larry fast.

"Come on out now!" the foreman cried.

Larry endeavored to, but failed. He tried to take a few steps, but sank back with a groan.

"My ankle's broken!" he exclaimed.

"Let me look at it," the foreman said, with rough sympathy in his tones. "I'm a sort of doctor. Have to be, with a lot of men getting hurt all the while."

Entering the ruined shack he picked Larry up as easily as if the young reporter was a child, and carried him outside. Then he looked at the right

foot, which was the one that pained the lad. The ankle was swollen, and the shoelaces were stretched tight across the instep. The foreman whipped out his knife, and cut the strings.

"That's better," said Larry, with a sigh of relief.

"It's only sprained, not broken," the foreman announced, after gently feeling of the injury. "You'll be laid up a week or so."

"Can't I walk now; I mean in a little while?" asked Larry.

"Not unless you want to lame yourself permanently."

"But I've got to!" the lad exclaimed. "I've got to send the story of this thing in."

"Say, don't you worry about the story," exclaimed one of the other reporters. "We'll look out for you, all right. Stanley will telephone it in for you, and tell how you got laid up. We're not after a beat on this. Don't worry."

"But I'm afraid Mr. Emberg will want to hear from me," said Larry, who, if he had developed any faults yet as a newspaper man, was blessed with that of being too conscientious.

"I'll drive you to the telephone station in my rig," volunteered the foreman. "I guess your sprained ankle won't prevent you from talking, provided you feel you have to do it."

"Thanks, I'll do that," answered Larry, glad of the chance to send the story in himself, though he was grateful for the aid of the other reporters.

There was nothing more to be obtained in the way of a story, as the big stack was leveled, though the task had not been as well performed as had been hoped. So Larry was lifted into the carriage, and driven to the nearest telephone. There he explained matters to Mr. Emborg, who had a reporter take the account over the wire, as Larry explained all the details, including the smashing of the shack.

"Now you go home, and doctor yourself up," said Mr. Emborg, coming in on the wire when Larry had finished his story. "Mr. Newton or I will be over to see you to-night. Take care of yourself, and don't worry. Your job will be here when you get ready to come back."

This relieved Larry's mind for he was a little uncertain as to what happened to reporters who were not able to come to work. Then, again being helped into the foreman's carriage, Larry was driven to his home, and very much surprised Mrs. Dexter and Lucy were to see him brought to the house, unable to walk.

Matters were soon explained, however, and a doctor was sent for. He said the sprain, while a bad and painful one, was not likely to last long, and promised Larry that, if he was careful, he might be able to go out in a week or ten days.

"Can't you make it any sooner, doctor?" asked Larry.

"I'm afraid not, my boy. That's a short enough

time to let the cords and sinews get into shape again."

Larry made up his mind to bear it as best he could, and, with Lucy's help, he hobbled to an easy-chair, where he sat down, while his sister made him comfortable with cushions.

"Where's Jimmy?" asked Larry, suddenly, as he happened to think that he had not seen his little brother since coming home. His heart began to beat, almost, in fear.

"He and Mary went up on the top floor to call on a little girl who lives there," answered Mrs. Dexter.

"Are you sure he's there?" asked Larry, in such a peculiar tone that Mrs. Dexter was startled.

"Of course, Larry. What makes you ask such a question? Do you want to see him?"

"Oh, nothing special," replied the reporter. "I was just wondering where he was." He did not dare to tell the real reason for his inquiry, which was prompted by a fear lest the kidnappers should have been at work.

But his mind was soon set at rest, for Jimmy came downstairs all excited over a new game he had learned. He came in on the jump, but stopped when he saw Larry propped up in his chair.

"Are you dead?" he asked, solemnly.

"Not quite," replied Larry, with a laugh. "I was in an accident, that's all."

"Tell me about it; every word," demanded the little fellow.

So Larry had to go over it all again for the benefit of his brother, whose eyes grew big, as Larry told of the crash of the big stack and the smashing of the shanty.

In the evening Mr. Newton called, and congratulated Larry on his escape from possible injury, if not death.

"Mr. Emborg thinks a heap of you, Larry," said the older reporter. "Your calling up on the 'phone, and giving the story, in spite of being hurt, shows, he says, that you're made of the right kind of stuff."

"Oh, anybody would have done what I did," said Larry, modestly.

It was pleasant to be praised, however, and he was glad that his efforts had been appreciated. Larry wanted to talk about the blue-handed man, and the threats the gang had made. He wanted to ask Mr. Newton if anything new had developed, but could get no chance, as Mrs. Dexter and Lucy were within hearing distance all the while. However, Mr. Newton must have guessed what was in Larry's wind, for he said, in a low tone, as he was leaving:

"I'll be over soon again, Larry, and I'll see if we can't think of some scheme to land the gang."

Larry was laid up about a week and a half. He fretted over being kept in the house, when the weather was so fine out of doors, but the doctor

said if his patient did not keep quiet, serious injury might follow using the ankle too soon. At length Larry was able to hobble about on crutches, and then, a couple of days later, ventured out on the sidewalk. He began to be more hopeful after that.

Meanwhile he heard every day from the office, and Mr. Emberg sent messages of encouragement. Larry was told to take as long as he wanted to get well, as his salary would go on just the same. When pay-night came Mr. Emberg brought the young reporter his envelope, for which Larry was very thankful.

At the end of two weeks Larry felt strong enough to go back to work, provided he did not have to run any races, or chase after cars. So, one bright morning, walking with a slight limp that was daily growing less, Larry went down to the office. On the way he wondered whether he would hear any more about the gang. They seemed to have ceased operations, or if they had not, they were biding their time. Larry received no more warning letters, though he often looked for them.

The young reporter was welcomed back to his desk with considerable enthusiasm among his colleagues. They said they had missed him, and were glad to see him at work once again.

There was not much to do that day, and Larry was told by Mr. Emberg to go home early.

"You ought to take in the circus," said the city

editor. "It will do you good after having been shut up in the house so long. I'll send for some complimentary tickets for you."

"I have some," put in Larry, telling about the passes the lion-tamer had given him.

"Then you'd better go, take someone with you, and enjoy the performance," the city editor said.

Larry made up his mind he would take Jimmy, who had done nothing but talk circus for the last two weeks, and that evening, when the subject was broached, the youngster stood on his head in delight.

"Do you think you can keep awake?" asked Mrs. Dexter. "The show lasts a long time."

"Well, if he can't keep awake at a circus, mother, he's not much of a boy," spoke Larry, laughing.

"Sure I'll stay awake," Jimmy replied.

Jimmy thought the circus performance was nothing short of fairyland. It was the first he had been to since he was old enough to remember things, and the one in New York had all the gorgeousness that can be dreamed of.

Larry, too, enjoyed himself. He was particularly interested in Nero, the lion, and pointed the ugly beast out to Jimmy. The brute kept in one corner of his cage, and growled.

"His toothache bothers him yet," explained one of the men, who remembered Larry's performance. "I guess we'll have to pull it."

"Pull a lion's tooth?" inquired Larry. "I never heard of such a thing."

"Often done," replied the trainer. "Much easier than yanking one from an elephant. If we decide to extract a molar from Nero's jaw, I'll send word down to the paper, if you leave me your name, and you can get a story out of it."

Larry thanked the man, and handed over a business card. Then he and Jimmy went and sat down in the seats where they could see the performance. It was all fine and exciting, but the stunt where the man seemed to be falling from his trapeze seemed to make the biggest hit, and Larry felt that he had a sort of proprietary interest in it, from having seen it practiced.

However, as all good things must have an end, the circus had one also, and the performance was concluded shortly after eleven o'clock.

"Are you sleepy?" asked Larry of his brother.

"Not a bit," replied the little chap, struggling to suppress a yawn. "My eyes hurt, that's all."

"Oh!" said Larry, laughing, as he took hold of Jimmy's hand, and began leading him toward an exit. There was a big crowd, and Larry soon found himself and his brother in the midst of a dense throng. He was pushed this way and shoved that way. All the while he kept tight hold of Jimmy's hand.

Suddenly he felt the little fellow pulled away from him. Larry looked down. There was no trace of the boy.

"I must have been separated from him in the crush," thought Larry. "I'll find him outside the door."

He hurried out, and rapidly scanned the crowd for a glimpse of Jimmy. The boy was not in sight, and Larry's heart began to sink.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AN ANXIOUS SEARCH

"I GUESS he's just mixed up in the crowd," murmured Larry, trying to make himself believe nothing harmful had befallen Jimmy. "He's so little that I can't see him. I'll soon find him, though."

Then Larry caught sight of a policeman he knew, and hurried up to the officer.

"I've lost my little brother, Mr. Sullivan," he said. "Where had I better start to look for him?"

"Hello, Larry, me boy!" the officer exclaimed good-naturedly, for he had taken quite a fancy to the young reporter since Larry had given him a little puff in the paper about stopping a runaway horse. "In trouble, eh? Well, I'll show you what we do with lost children. We have a regular place for 'em here in the Garden. They're always gettin' lost, and their fathers an' mothers is half crazy. Come with me."

Officer Sullivan led the way to a small room off the main offices of those in charge of the show. It was an apartment fitted up for the care of lost children. The management had found that scores of tots whom their parents brought to the circus

got lost every day, and the policemen on duty at the show had orders to bring them to the "nursery," as it was called. There were two nurses and a matron in charge to look after the little folk.

"Here's a lad to claim one of your lost children, Mrs. Weston," said Mr. Sullivan, as he took Larry to the matron. "His little brother is missing."

"What is he like?" asked the matron.

Larry described Jimmy as well as he could.

"Let me see," mused Mrs. Weston. "No, I don't believe I have your brother in here yet, though I may get him at any moment. Now if he was a year or two younger I'm sure I could fix you up, as I have some that answer his description perfectly, except for age. You're sure you can't be mistaken?"

"I'm sure," replied Larry, who was beginning to become more worried.

"Because, you know, if you were not positive, you might be mistaken," went on the matron. "I wish you could find your brother among those I have. I'd like to get rid of some of them. The crop is unusually heavy to-night."

By this time the big Garden was beginning to be pretty well cleared of the crowd. Mothers and fathers who missed their children had begun to drift in and claim them, being directed to the "nursery," by policemen in different parts of the amusement place. One after another of the chil-

dren were taken away, until there was none left. Little Jimmy had not been found.

Larry's heart was like lead. He hardly dared to go home, and tell his mother what had happened. That the blue-handed gang had kidnapped the boy Larry had no doubt. That was why they had been following him around for the last few weeks. Yet, even though he knew this must be true, Larry hated to give in to the belief.

He stayed around the Garden for a long time, until the men began to put the lights out, hoping against hope that Jimmy would turn up somewhere. But, at last, when it came time to close the place, Larry could remain no longer.

"What shall I do?" he thought. "I'm afraid the shock will make mother sick. I'm sure he'll not be harmed by the gang, and they'll give him back to us as soon as mother and I agree to sign the deed. I will put an advertisement in the papers to-morrow—no! I'll do it to-night! There's time enough yet. I must find Mr. Newton, and tell him. He'll help me!"

Now that he had decided on a plan of action, Larry felt a little better. There's nothing so bad for worry or grief as thinking of it. As soon as one can get busy at something the spirits improve.

So it was in Larry's case. He started for Mr. Newton's house, intending to ask his advice about the wording of the notice to be put in the

morning papers. He had about an hour yet before the time for taking advertisements would be up.

As he was hurrying away he was hailed by Officer Sullivan.

"Did ye find him, Larry?"

"No, he wasn't brought into the nursery."

"Well, don't worry. Probably some policeman farther down the street picked him up, and took him to the nearest station-house. I'll turn in an alarm for him, and you can inquire at headquarters whether any lost children have been picked up. Give me a description of him."

Larry did so, and then resumed his trip. He made up his mind to stop at police headquarters on his way back from Mr. Newton's, and then to go home and tell his mother the sad news, provided there was none better to relate.

Mr. Newton was much shocked when Larry told what had happened. He made the youth go over every incident.

"Of course, there's a bare possibility that the gang has not kidnapped him," spoke the older reporter, "but it looks suspicious."

"What had I better do?" asked Larry. "I'm afraid to go home and tell my mother."

"I'll go with you," replied Mr. Newton. "But before we go we'll get an advertisement ready. We'll insert it in several papers. I don't believe in giving in to these blackmailers, but I think in this case we can set a trap for them by this ad-

vertisement. I have been doing some work on the case, and I think there'll be some developments shortly."

"If I only knew that Jimmy was safe, I'd not worry so much," said Larry, with something like a sob in his throat.

"I think he will be treated all right by the gang," replied Mr. Newton. "It would not be their policy to hurt him. They are only trying to scare you."

"Well, they're succeeding pretty well."

Mr. Newton got his hat, and, having written several advertisements stating that a certain person was ready to do what a certain blue-handed man desired, provided a certain person was restored to his home, he and Larry went out. They headed for several newspaper offices on Park Row, and soon the advertisement had been accepted, and paid for. It was to appear under the head of "Personals."

"Now we'll see what good that will do," observed Mr. Newton, as he reached the last office just in time to have the notice taken for the next day's paper. "I think you had better be getting home, too. Your mother will be worried at your absence. I'll go along."

"She'll be more worried when I do get home," remarked Larry, dubiously. "But I suppose there's no help for it."

Frightened enough was Mrs. Dexter when Mr. Newton broke the news to her as gently as possi-

ble. She grew pale, and then almost fainted, while Mary and Lucy, when they heard the bad tidings, began to cry, though Mary hardly knew what for, save that something had happened to make her mother sad.

"Now don't you get down-hearted," advised Mr. Newton. "We'll find Jimmy for you just as soon as we can. Maybe we'll have him for you before morning. He may have been picked up by some persons who saw he was lost, and they may have taken him home. There are hundreds of things that might have happened. You'll be laughing at this scare in a few days."

"I'm sure I hope so," replied Mrs. Dexter, with a sigh.

Leaving Larry to comfort his mother as best he could, Mr. Newton set off to make a trip to police headquarters. He wanted to be sure that Jimmy was not lost in the usual manner in which hundreds of New York children are lost every week. From the sergeant in charge Mr. Newton learned that the usual number of little ones had been picked up. They were at the various precinct station-houses, awaiting owners. Some had been there since early morning, their mothers either having forgotten all about them, or else thinking they were safe at some relative's or neighbor's house.

None of the unclaimed ones, however, answered the description of Larry's brother. They were too young or too old, too large or too small,

or had some other feature about them that precluded any chance of one being Jimmy.

"Do your best on this case, Tom," Mr. Newton said to the sergeant behind the desk, as he was leaving. "Send out a general alarm. The child's a little brother of a reporter on the *Leader*, and a friend of mine. If you hear anything during the night from any of the precincts, call me up. I have a 'phone in the house, now."

"I will," promised the sergeant. "I hope they find the little lad."

Rather tired, but not discouraged, Mr. Newton went home. He knew the police would do their best, as many of them were friends of his, and, besides, the bluecoats had a very good feeling toward the *Leader*, as it had advocated higher pay for the police and firemen, and the measure had passed the Legislature, so there was in line with his duty nothing a bluecoat would not do for the *Leader*.

But the night wore on, and there came no word to Mr. Newton concerning Jimmy. The reporter went to bed about two o'clock, leaving word for the elevator attendant to awaken him in time to get to work at the usual hour.

In their rooms, waiting, and hoping against hope, sat Mrs. Dexter, Larry, and Lucy. Mary had fallen asleep. It was a sad household, though Larry tried hard to make his mother feel that there was no danger to Jimmy.

"I can't help crying," replied Mrs. Dexter.

"My little boy has never been away from me a night in his life. He'll cry so hard, and be so frightened at those rough men! Oh, Larry! Why did they do it? Let them have all they ask, only get Jimmy back!"

"Maybe the men who are after the property have not got Jimmy," suggested Larry, hoping to cheer up his mother.

"Oh, I'm sure he been kidnapped!" she exclaimed. "I feel that he has. I only hope they will not harm him," and the poor woman began to cry softly again, in spite of the efforts Lucy and Larry made to comfort her.

Thus the long night wore on; none in the Dexter household, save little Mary, sleeping more than a few minutes at a time. Every now and then one of them would awaken, thinking they heard someone coming, bringing what might prove joyful news, but each time it was a false alarm.

CHAPTER XXIX

IN THE ENEMY'S POWER

WHEN Jimmy, holding tightly to Larry's hand, started away from the bench in the Garden where he had watched the wonderful show, the little fellow's mind was in a tumult at what he had seen. It was one endless round of delight for him, and he was sorry that it was over, that the people were going home, and that the performers had disappeared.

"Let's go and see the animals again," begged Jimmy, but Larry was too intent on getting out of the crowd to pay any attention to the request.

Just at that moment a lad, who seemed to be about the same age as Larry, stepped up behind Jimmy, who was lagging in the rear. He cast a sharp look at the young reporter and his little brother, and, when the small chap asked to be taken once more to the animals, the youth seemed to be much excited.

He leaned over and whispered to Jimmy, taking good care that Larry did not see him.

"If you come with me I'll take you to the animals," the youth said. "We'll see the elephants, the tigers, the lions, the zebras, and the horses. Come on, Jimmy, and we'll have a good time!"

It was done in an instant, but, swift and low as the voice was, the little boy heard and understood. Still he remembered what his mother had said to him about keeping tight hold of Larry's hand. The strange youth seemed to understand this, for he went on:

"After we see the animals we'll come back to Larry. Don't let him know about this, for the animals might all run away, and we wouldn't see them again."

That settled it for Jimmy. He was ready to do anything to see the wild beasts again, and was willing to keep quiet for fear of scaring them away.

So, almost before he knew what he was doing, Jimmy had released his hold of Larry's hand, and clasped that of the strange youth who promised such delights as unlimited quantities of wild animals.

Once he had hold of Jimmy, the youth made his way rapidly through the crowd. He dodged this way and that, pulling the little chap along, half dragging him at times, until Jimmy, from very weariness, cried out:

"Please show me the wild animals. I'm awful tired!"

"We'll soon be there," the lad went on. "It's just around the next corner, and down a little ways. Oh, but you'll see the finest lot of animals that ever got into a circus!"

That satisfied Jimmy for a while, and he

trudged on, not noticing that the crowd was thinning out, that his leader had left the Garden, and was walking along the street.

"Where are the animals?" asked the little boy, who was beginning to feel that all was not right.

"It's a little further now," was the answer. "They are feeding the polar bear, and the lion is mad because they didn't give him his supper first, so we'll have to wait a while."

This seemed reasonable to Jimmy, who knew that bears and lions were fierce beasts, and had to be humored. So he said nothing, only he wondered more and more why he had been taken away from the music and lights, and the companionship of his brother. But he was so small that he had no suspicions.

On and on the two trudged. They had left the well-lighted streets, and were in a dark section of the city, where only an occasional gas lamp gave a fitful gleam that illuminated a small circle, and seemed to leave the rest in denser blackness than if there had been no light.

"I'm afraid!" Jimmy said, after a while. "I want to go home!"

"All right; we'll go home after we see the animals!" said the youth, who seemed much elated over something.

"Don't want to see any animals! Want to go home!" Jimmy cried. "I want Larry! Take me to Larry!" and he began to sob.

"Now wait a minute!" the lad leading him ex-

claimed. "I'm going to show you the finest steam engine you ever saw, and I'll let you turn on the steam!"

"Honest and truly?" asked Jimmy, his mind suddenly turned from the idea of tears.

"Sure," replied the youth. "It's just around the corner. Come on, now, before it gets away."

Thereupon Jimmy hurried, full of glee at what had always been one of his childish ambitions—to run a steam-engine. The youth leading him went down many streets, until it seemed to the little fellow they must have traversed several miles. But Jimmy did not think of complaining, though he was very tired. His feet lagged behind now and again, however, and the youth leading him noticed this.

"Poor kid, I sort of hate to do this," he said, "but I have to, or lose my job, and I never could get another after what I've done. I wish I could take a car, but someone might see us, and then the jig would be up. It isn't much farther, that's one good thing."

He had been talking to himself in a low tone, and now and then he looked down on Jimmy to see how the little boy was standing the journey.

"Is it much farther?" asked the small lad.

"Not much. Just you think about the steam-engine, and you'll not notice how tired you are."

"I'm trying to," replied Jimmy, blinking to keep back the tears.

The youth chose the darkest and least-fre-

quented streets, and seemed anxious to escape observation, as he led Jimmy along. Once he saw a policeman standing under a gas-lamp, and, at the sight of the bluecoat, the youth darted across the street, and slunk along in the shadow, keeping Jimmy on the side farthest away from the officer, at the same time cautioning the little boy to remain quiet, and not speak.

Down a side street that was more gloomy and lonesome than any they had yet traversed, the youth led his captive. There was, here and there, a gas-lamp, but it seemed to make the darkness only more intense. Strange-looking figures flitted here and there out of the shadows, apparently afraid of what little light there was.

Figures there were with loosely-fitting clothes, wide sleeves to the jackets, and wide trousers. On their feet were shoes with thick soles, and some of them had long braids of hair hanging down their backs. Jimmy caught sight of one, and huddled closer to the youth.

"There's a Chinaman!" the little fellow exclaimed. "I'm afraid of him!"

"Sure he's a Chinaman," the youth agreed. "I call 'em Chinks. Nobody here calls 'em Chinamen."

"I'm afraid," repeated Jimmy. He always had had a sort of horror of the almond-eyed Celestials.

"They won't hurt you," the youth assured him. "This is where they live. This is Chinatown."

You'll have lots of fun. I know a Chink that'll make you a fine kite that'll sail away up in the air."

"Honest?" asked the little boy, his fear temporarily gone at the mention of the kite.

"Sure, if you're a good boy."

"You get the kite, and give it to me," pleaded Jimmy. "I'm a-skeered to have a Chinaman come near me."

"All right, I will," agreed the youth. Then in a lower tone he added. "It's a good thing he is afraid. It will keep him from trying to escape. The house is full of Chinks, and he'll not try to leave the room after I get him in. I'll have an easier time than I thought I would."

They went on past several dark houses. Now and then a door would open, letting a glimmer of light out from the hall. The portal would close quickly again, and the figure that had come out would slink along as though afraid of being seen.

"Here we are!" the youth exclaimed, coming to a halt in front of a three-storied building that was darker and more gloomy-looking than any they had yet passed.

"Is the steam-engine here?" asked Jimmy.

"Sure, come on in."

"And the kite?"

"Yep. Come along, now, kid, and don't make any noise."

Hardly able to drag one foot after another, so tired was he, Jimmy followed his captor to the

stairs. Up two flights they went, until they came to the third-floor hall, then along that corridor until they reached a door that had a crude drawing of the rising sun painted upon it. The youth gave three raps, paused a second, rapped four times, and then thirteen times in quick succession. A little panel in the door opened, and a voice whispered:

"Who's there?"

"The Mikado's messenger," was the youth's answer. "Hurry up and let me in; don't go through all the usual foolishness."

"What does he bring?" the voice proceeded.

"A watermelon," was the youth's reply. "Come on now, Jake, it's only——"

"Mention no names!" exclaimed the voice, seemingly in anger. "Remember your instructions."

The next instant the door opened, and the youth, pushing Jimmy in front of him, entered, when the portal was quickly shut. The man who had been at the slide locked and barred the door, and then followed the youth and Jimmy down a passage that led toward a room where a light glowed.

"Who's coming?" asked a voice from the room.

"It's me," replied the youth.

"Any luck?"

"Sure; I've got the kid."

"No! Good for you, Peter!" and then, as the

youth and Jimmy entered the room, a man, who seemed to be scrubbing his hands at a sink, looked up, and laughed. "Good enough, Peter," he went on. "We'll see what our friend Larry Dexter has to say now. He'll sing a different tune, I guess."

"What you doing?" asked Peter Manton, for it was the old copy boy of the *Leader* who had kidnapped Jimmy, and delivered him into the power of the gang.

"Trying to get rid of that blue stuff on my hands," was the man's answer. "It sticks worse than a porous plaster. I'll not dare to go out now, for that reporter, Newton, will have every detective in New York looking for me, and if they see my hands, even in gloves, they'll nab me, and the game will be up."

"Do you think they'll suspect you?" asked Peter.

"Suspect? They probably know for a certainty that I'm mixed up in this. Those reporters are no fools. They're better than half the detectives."

"Will they suspect me?" asked Peter, with something like a whimper in his voice.

"Of course, and if they get us you'll have to take your medicine with the rest."

"You said you'd protect me," said Peter.

"So I will as much as I can," replied the blue-handed man, "but I can't fight the whole police force. I've done pretty well as it is."

"I want the steam-engine and the kite," said Jimmy, his voice trembling. "I want to go home! I want Larry!"

"We must keep him quiet," the blue-handed man said. "Give him something to eat, and get out some kind of Chinese toys. He'll be asleep pretty soon, if I'm any judge."

CHAPTER XXX

JIMMY HELD CAPTIVE

JIMMY was ready to burst into tears. He had kept his courage up under the strangeness of being taken away from Larry, by the promise of the animals first, then the steam-engine, and next the kite. When none of these was forthcoming, the boy felt that he had been fooled, and this made him feel badly. Then, too, he was really frightened by the darkness and the strange man and place to which he had been brought.

"Here, kid!" called Peter, after rummaging in a closet, "here's a fine jumping-jack," and he gave Jimmy a Chinese toy.

It was arranged so that, by pressing two pieces of wood which formed the handle of the jumping-jack, the manikin would cut all sorts of queer capers. For a while this served to take Jimmy's mind off his troubles.

"Now get him something to eat," the blue-handed man ordered Peter. "The rest of the fellows will be coming here pretty soon, and we'll have to talk business. Go out and get him some pie."

"Pie's no good for kids," remarked Peter.

"No? Well, I used to like it when I was a youngster," the man replied.

"It will give him the nightmare, and keep him awake," spoke Peter. "I'd better give him crackers and milk."

"All right, whatever you say. It's so long since I've had anything to do with babies that I don't know what they need. Now don't you worry," the blue-handed man went on, turning to Jimmy, while Peter got out the food. "I'm sorry we had to bring you here, but we'll take good care of you, and if your friends do the right thing, you'll soon be allowed to go."

"I want to go now," said Jimmy.

"I'd be glad to let you, I'm sure," spoke the man, "if only that brother of yours would do what we want him to in the matter of land, we would. But, of course, you don't understand about that."

By this time Peter had fixed some crackers and milk for the little fellow, who was quite hungry. The blue-handed man resumed the work of trying to remove the stains of nitro-glycerine from his fingers, and while he ate Jimmy watched him curiously.

In a little while, however, Jimmy's eyes began to grow more and more heavy, his head nodded lower and lower, and, almost before he knew it, he had fallen asleep.

"He's off," announced Peter.

"Well, put him to bed," instructed the blue-

handed man. "I'm glad he's out of the way. Here come some of the fellows."

As Peter was carrying Jimmy to a bed in an inner room, the sound of steps was heard in the hall. Then came the odd raps, such as Peter had given, and the questions and answers. Then the blue-handed man admitted three other men. They went to the main room, and while Peter prepared to go to bed in the same apartment where Jimmy was, all of the men sat about the table.

"Well, what's the news?" asked one of the newcomers. "Getting the stains off, Noddy?"

"I wish you'd keep quiet about those stains," said the blue-handed man, rather angrily. "I'm having trouble enough over them. But, for all that, I've done more than you have, Sam Perkins."

"What have you done?"

"I've got the kid."

"Which one, Larry or his brother?"

"His brother. Peter copped him to-night at the circus. He's here now."

"Good for you!" exclaimed Perkins. "That's something like. Now we can go ahead with that land business. Alderman Beacham was saying the other day, if we didn't pull the thing off pretty soon the committee would have to make a report. Once the thing becomes public our chance of making a fortune is gone."

"I guess that Larry will come to time now,"

remarked Noddy. "I'll look for a personal from him in the papers to-morrow, saying he's ready to sign the deed. I'm getting tired of keeping the paper around. It's a dangerous document to be found on me."

"I hope you have it in a safe place," remarked one of the men, who had not yet spoken save to greet Noddy.

"The safest place in the world," replied Noddy. He pointed to a mantelpiece, on which were a number of objects. One was what seemed to be a folded newspaper stuck behind a vase, and half showing. "There it is," he said, indicating the newspaper.

"I don't call that very secure," remarked Perkins.

"It is, because it's so simple," argued Noddy. "If I had it in a safe or a strong-box, that would be the first place they would look for it if they broke in. But they'd never think of unfolding that piece of newspaper, because it's so common. They'd say to themselves that I'd never be so foolish as to leave it in plain sight that way, and so they'd pass over it."

"That's a good idea," admitted Dick Randall, the man who had asked about the deed.

"Well, what's the next thing on the programme?" asked Noddy, after the men had lighted cigars which he produced.

"We'll wait a few days until we hear from Larry, I think," spoke Perkins.

"But if he don't answer, and agree to do as we want?"

"Well, then, we'll have to drop him a gentle hint that something is liable to happen to the kid here."

"But you wouldn't hurt the little fellow!" exclaimed Noddy. "I wouldn't stand for that," he went on. "I'm bad enough and desperate enough, as all of you know, but if there's going to be any game that includes hurting a little chap, you can not only cut me out of it, but I'll not stand for it, and I'll——" and the blue-handed man seemed to be very much in earnest.

"Getting chicken-hearted?" sneered Perkins.

"Well, you can call it what you like," went on Noddy, looking at his stained hands, "but I'm not as low as that yet. I want this deal to go through as much as any of you fellows, but I'll not step over a certain line, and the sooner you know it the better."

"You don't mean to say you'll peach on us?" asked Randall.

"Not unless I have to," answered Noddy, calmly. "It depends on how far you go."

"Noddy's right," remarked Randall, with a wink at the other two. "I'm opposed to hurting the child. We'll only use him for scaring Larry and his mother into doing what we want. After all, we're giving the young cub and the widow a fair price for this land. We're taking a lot of risks, and it's only fair we should be paid for 'em."

It isn't as if we were trying to get the land for nothing."

"Oh, I'm with you in anything reasonable," spoke the blue-handed man. "Only, don't hurt the little kid. That's my last word. I used to have a little boy once—before I went to the bad," and he turned his head away.

For a long time the gang sat up and discussed their programme. Their talk revealed that they had laid a well-planned plot to get possession of Jimmy, in order to have a hold over Larry. They had watched and schemed to kidnap him, but Larry's watchfulness had foiled them a number of times. At last, as has been seen, the opportunity came most unexpectedly.

Peter, who had been appointed to shadow Larry at different times, watched him set out for the circus. The former copy boy, whom association with bad men had made sharp-witted, had seen his chance in the Garden, and taken advantage of it.

Jimmy had been brought to one of the worst dens in New York's Chinatown. It was hired by a gang of white men who were worse than the lowest Celestial criminals. The room, the door of which had a rising sun painted on it, was the headquarters of a notorious band of men.

The existence of the gang was known to the police, but so cunning were the members, and so elusive were they, that few, and only the least important, had ever been arrested.

It was into the power of this gang and to their headquarters that Jimmy had been brought, a fate which his worst enemy, provided he had one, would never have wished him.

"Well, we might as well break up," said Randall, at length.

"I don't see that we can do anything more," remarked Perkins, "unless our legal friend here, Mr. Snyder, has some advice to give."

"No," replied the third member of the party, who had not yet spoken, "I think we'll let things take their course. When I think you need advice I'll give it."

He smiled, and rubbed his hands together as though he was wrapping up ill-gotten money. He was a lawyer who had once been a brilliant member of the bar, but whose tricky practices had driven him from the courts. Now he was the official legal adviser of the Rising Sun crowd, and many was the scrape he had helped them out of. He also planned some crimes, and assisted in carrying them out.

"Well, get along, then," said the blue-handed man. "I want to close up here, and get some sleep. I've got a family on my hands now," and he laughed in a mirthless sort of way.

"We'll see you to-morrow night," remarked Perkins. "We may have some news by then that will relieve you of your charge."

"I'm sure I hope so," spoke Noddy, locking the door, as the three men went softly out.

He listened to their footsteps dying away down the hall. Then Noddy went into the room where Peter and Jimmy were. Both had fallen asleep; Jimmy's face tear-stained, for he had wept when he found there were neither kites, steam-engines, nor even Larry to comfort him.

"Poor little kid," sighed the blue-handed man. "I wish you were out of this. I'm sorry I ever went into the game, but now I'm in I suppose I'll have to stay. Well, if they try to hurt you they'll have me to reckon with," and then, with another look at the little boy, and wiping what might have been tears from his eyes, Noddy went to his own bedroom.

CHAPTER XXXI

SEARCHING FOR THE LOST

WHEN the Dexter household awoke the morning after the night on which Jimmy had disappeared, it seemed as if it was all a bad dream or nightmare. It did not seem possible that the little fellow was missing, and Larry, as he roused himself from his uneasy slumbers, and jumped out of bed, was half inclined to believe that it was all only a vision of the darkness.

But the absence of Jimmy's cheerful call, silence in his room, and the lack of the child's merry laugh, soon emphasized the fact that he was missing.

No one felt like eating breakfast, and Mrs. Dexter was so much affected that Larry feared she would become ill.

"Now, mother," he said to her, "you must not worry so. I'll admit there's lots of cause for it, but we'll find Jimmy sooner or later. He can't be hurt. He's probably, as I said, been taken by that gang, but it's to their interest to keep him safe. He has a claim on the property the same as you or I have, and if any—any harm came to him it would only mix things up for them. You

can depend on it, they'll take very good care of Jimmy."

"Do you think so?" asked Mrs. Dexter.

"Sure," replied Larry. "Besides we'll have him back in a few days, no matter where he is. Mr. Newton and I will start on the search. The *Leader* will help us, and all the police in the city will lend a hand, as they are friendly toward our paper."

"That's right, mother," chimed in Lucy. "Don't worry, and I'm sure it will all come out right. I feel that Jimmy will come back safe to us."

"I'll try," said Mrs. Dexter, wiping the tears from her eyes, "but it's a terrible thing to have a little boy kidnapped."

Larry made a light breakfast, and hurried to the office. Early as he was, he found Mr. Newton there before him. The older reporter showed the strain he was under, for he had slept but little. Pretty soon Mr. Emberg came in.

Mr. Newton soon explained the situation to the editor, and asked for a leave of absence for Larry and himself to enable them to trace down the gang and locate Jimmy.

"Of course you may go," said the city editor. "Call on the *Leader* for any help you want, financial or otherwise. If you can get at this gang and break it up, or if you can get at the bottom of this land deal and make a story out of it, so much the better. Have your own way, your time

is your own. Come back to work, Larry, when you find your brother and clear up the mystery."

With this roving commission, Larry and Mr. Newton started away.

"Well, Larry," remarked the older reporter, "we seem to be sort of up against it."

"What are we going to do?" asked Larry, helplessly. "Mother is almost sick from worry, and if we don't find Jimmy soon I don't know what will happen."

"Larry," spoke Mr. Newton, solemnly, "we're going to find the little fellow. I don't pose as a prophet, and my predictions don't always come true, but I'm going to succeed in this, and we're not going to give in to those scoundrels, either. There's something big in this for you and your mother, or I'm greatly mistaken. Otherwise the gang would not be so anxious to get that land. But we're going to let that go for a while, and work only on clues that will lead to finding your brother. We'll begin at the beginning, which is at the Garden, where he disappeared."

The two reporters went to where the circus was holding forth. It was about ten o'clock in the morning, and the big arena had a very different appearance from the night before, when thousands of lights lent a glamour to the scene, and when gayly-dressed men and women added to the brilliance.

Now everything was dark and dreary. A few men, seemingly too tired to move, were fixing

up some of the apparatus, and others were sweeping and dusting. It was a glance behind the scenes with everything at its worst.

Mr. Newton knew several of the managers of the departments, and soon was in conversation with them. He wanted to find out who of the circus men were on duty at the gate Larry and Jimmy left by.

From the man who kept the list of employees Mr. Newton learned exactly what he wanted to know.

"It was Bill Lynch," the bookkeeper said. "Maybe he can help you, but he'll not be here until near noon. He's on guard at No. 16 entrance."

It was tedious waiting for Lynch, but at last he came in. Larry and Mr. Newton made a dash for him, almost before the man had his coat off, preparatory to donning his uniform.

"What's this, a hold-up?" he asked, good-naturedly.

"A hold-up for information," said Mr. Newton. "We want to know something about a boy who is missing, and who is supposed to have passed out the gate where you stood last night," and the reporter described Jimmy.

"My lands!" the man said. "I can't remember every boy I see. I don't take notice of the thousands that pass by me every night. If I did I'd go crazy. All I do is to see that they keep order."

"But he was with me," put in Larry. "I had hold of his hand, and I was leading him out, when he asked me to come and see the animals again. But I was in too much of a hurry to get out to pay any attention to him. Now can't you remember? Right after that I missed him, and made a lot of inquiries."

"I remember there was quite some stir about a missing boy last night," remarked Mr. Lynch, "but that happens so often I paid no attention to it. But now that you speak of it, I do seem to recall something about a boy begging to be taken to see the animals again. It was rather odd, I call to mind now, I was thinking, that a lad who had seen all the trapeze stunts inside would be wanting to go back to the animals. Most of 'em, as soon as they comes out, asks their fathers or mothers to buy 'em a trapeze, or some flying rings. But I recall I heard one little lad asking to be taken to the animals, and possibly it's the one you're inquiring of."

"I'm sure it is!" exclaimed Larry. "What happened to him?"

"As near as I can recollect," went on Mr. Lynch, "I heard someone tell him to come with him, and he'd see the beasts. Didn't you take him yourself?"

"No," replied Larry. "Try and think, Mr. Lynch, what sort of a person it was enticed him away."

The doorkeeper seemed lost in thought. He

pondered over the matter, striving to bring back to his mind the scene he had almost forgotten.

"I think I have it!" he exclaimed. "There was a lad about your age," indicating Larry, "who came up behind the little chap, and said something about taking him to see the animals. I didn't pay much attention, for I thought you were all together."

"What sort of a boy was this one you speak of?" asked Mr. Newton, eagerly.

"Well, he was what I'd call a bold-looking lad," was the answer. "Not a nice sort of a chap at all, though he seemed smart." He proceeded to describe the boy more fully when Mr. Newton interrupted him:

"I'm pretty sure I know who he was!"

"So am I!" cried Larry. "It was Peter Manton!"

"The very one I had in mind," spoke Mr. Newton. "That only proves what we believed all along. It is the gang with the blue-handed man at the head that has Jimmy. Peter is only one of the tools. Yet we may be able to get a clew through him. He's liable to make a false move, not being as well versed in crime as the older ones. I think we are beginning to see daylight, Larry."

"But it's a pretty faint clew," objected Larry.

"Yes, of course, but we can't expect everything. We've got a clew quicker than I expected we would. Now we will have to develop it and

work it up. I'm sure it will lead to something. We must get on the trail of Peter. Do you think you could do that?"

"I guess so," answered Larry.

"Then we'll split up this work," went on the older reporter. "You devote your time to locating Peter, or find out where he hangs out. If you get a chance, follow him. Sooner or later he'll go to the headquarters of the gang. I'll work on another end."

"What are you going to do?" asked Larry.

"I'm going to start my investigations from the sign of the blue hand," replied Mr. Newton.

"Not from the place in Chinatown where you were nearly injured by those men?"

"That's what I'm going to do. But don't be alarmed. There's no one at that place now. The gang moved out soon after I traced them there, and have not been back since. I learned that from some detectives. So there's no danger in going back there."

"But what good will it do?"

"It may put me on the track of the gang's new headquarters. That it is somewhere in Chinatown I'm certain, but to locate it is a harder proposition. I may be able to make friends with someone in the house where the room with the sign of the blue hand on the door is located, and he may be able to tell me where the members of the gang hold out. Once I get a clew the rest will be comparatively easy."

"Well, I hope you'll succeed," spoke Larry. "In the meanwhile I'll see if I can locate Peter."

Arranging to meet again late that night at Mr. Newton's house, Larry and his friend separated. The boy hardly knew where to begin. Without experience in this sort of work, for which Mr. Newton's training as a newspaper reporter fitted him, Larry thought the only way to do would be to walk about the streets, taking a chance of seeing Peter in the crowds that passed by. He even tried this plan, but he saw that it would be apt to fail, since the chances were so much against him.

"I ought to start at the beginning," he said. "That is, if I knew where the beginning was."

Then it occurred to him that the most natural way would be to find out where Peter lived, or had lived, and to go there.

"I wonder why I didn't think of that at first?" mused Larry. "Of course I should have. I'll go back to the office. They'll probably have Peter's address on the payroll."

Back to the *Leader* office he went. He explained what he wanted to Mr. Emborg, who soon ascertained from the cashier's books where the former copy boy had lived.

"But he probably doesn't live there now," said the city editor. "This was nearly a year ago. He's likely moved since."

"I'll trace him!" exclaimed Larry. "I'll get on his trail and find him, if he's in the city."

CHAPTER XXXII

IN QUEST OF PETER

THE address Larry had as that where Peter had lived took him to a poor, though respectable, part of the city. It was pretty well uptown, on the East Side, and the young reporter soon found himself in a thickly-settled tenement district. The streets were filled with children, among whom pushcart peddlers shoved their vehicles laden with everything from fish to calico, and from books to suspenders. After some search Larry located the house where Peter had resided.

There were five floors, and four families lived on each.

"That makes twenty places to inquire, if I don't strike the right place first," reasoned Larry. "Well, it's like hunting a needle in a haystack, but it's got to be done."

He knocked at the door of the first apartment on the first floor. No one answered, and Larry tapped again, this time quite loudly. Suddenly a door across the hall opened, and a woman stuck her head out.

"Vell?" she inquired.

"Does Peter Manton live here?" asked Larry.

"Vat is?" asked the woman.

Larry repeated his question, at the same time coming closer to the door, thinking the woman had not heard him.

"Ich weiss nicht," she replied, that being the German equivalent for "I don't know," and then, having satisfied her curiosity, she closed the door.

"I guess that's what most of 'em will say," remarked Larry, who understood a little German.

He was about to knock on the third door of the first floor, when a boy stuck his head out of one apartment, and of him Larry asked where Peter lived.

"Has he a wart on his nose?" asked the boy.

"No," said Larry, who knew Peter was not marked in any such way.

"Does he squint with his left eye?"

"Not that I know of."

"Can he turn a double somersault?"

"I don't know."

"Is one of his front teeth gone?"

"No, his teeth are all right."

"Then I don't know him. All the fellers I know has something the matter with 'em, or else they can do somethin', I guess the feller you want has moved away."

But Larry did not want to trust to any chances. He went to the next floor, and made inquiries without success. Then he proceeded to the third floor. At the last apartment where he knocked an old man came to the door.

"Vell, mine friendt?" he inquired, and Larry

was beginning to think all the people in the house were German Jews. "Vat can I do for you to-day?"

"Do you know Peter Manton?" asked Larry.

"Peter vat?"

"Peter Manton."

"Does he sell suspenders?"

"Not that I ever heard of."

"Collar buttons, maybe yet, eh?"

"No, I guess not."

"Den he keeps a store alretty yet?"

"I guess not."

"Oh, vell, den I doan knows him by yet. I only know peoples vat is in business. Run away, leedle poy, an' doan bodder mit a business man," and then, while Larry watched him, the old fellow went back, leaving his door open, and proceeded to resume his slumbers in an easy-chair, whence Larry had aroused him.

"I guess I'll get very little information here," thought the searcher. Yet he would not give up. Not until he had knocked at the last door did he get any trace, and that came when he had almost despaired.

A woman answered the door, and, at the sight of Larry, she began to scream in a loud voice, and cried out:

"Goniff! Goniff! Goniff!"

"I'm not a thief!" exclaimed Larry, for he recognized the Yiddish word for robber, having heard it in his travels about the Jewish quarter

of New York. "I haven't stolen anything, and don't intend to."

He spoke sharply, for he feared the woman's cries would rouse the neighborhood, and, perhaps, make trouble for him. Fortunately, however, there was much noise caused by the children in the street shouting, and no one appeared to pay much attention to the woman's exclamations.

In a little while, when she saw that Larry had no evil designs, and did not attempt to steal her brass candlesticks or brass samovar, or tea-brewing apparatus, her two choicest possessions, the woman became calmer.

"Do you know Peter Manton?" asked Larry, who was beginning to tire of his own question.

"Hass he got funny eyes alretty yet?" asked the woman. "Eyes not like yours, vat look one in the face, but eyes vat always move about so——" and she shifted hers rapidly.

"Yes, he has," replied Larry, recognizing one of Peter's characteristics.

"I know him," the woman said.

"Where is he?" cried Larry.

"Come in," the woman requested, opening the door wider. "You must excuse me, young gentlemen. I am all alone here, and ven you comes by my door I t'ou't you vas a robbers yet. Once alretty dey comes and takes mine moneys. So I am of a carefulness when I goes py de door."

Then, as Larry questioned her, she told in broken English how Peter had once lived in the

house on the same floor she did. She remembered him because he was always playing tricks on her little nephew who had lived with her. But Peter had moved away, she said, and she did not know where.

"Can't you think?" begged Larry, to whom finding the former copy boy meant so much.

"I was so glad to see him go I care not where he lives yet," the woman answered. "But he has an aunt vat lives somewheres about t'ree blocks from here. Maybe she can tell."

Larry got the location of Peter's aunt, and with a somewhat lighter heart he set off to the address the Jewish woman had given him.

He had a little difficulty in finding Mrs. Jackson, the former copy boy's aunt, as she had moved twice since the Jewish woman knew of her, but eventually Larry discovered her. At first she was very guarded in her answers.

"What do you want to know for?" she demanded.

Then Larry told her as much of the story of his missing brother as he thought necessary. He described how he came to believe Peter had a hand in taking him away.

"I always knew Peter would come to no good end," said his aunt. "I warned my brother to whip him at least once a day to make him a better boy, but he would not, and now see what he has come to. Well, if I can help you, young man, I will. I'd just like to get hold of Peter," and

she looked as though Peter's experience under her administration would be anything but pleasant.

She looked over some old letters, and from them got the address of Peter's father, who had died some time before, leaving the boy in charge of a stepmother. To that address Larry went, only to find that the stepmother had married again, and gone away. Neighbors said Peter had not been seen about the place where he used to live, in some time. Larry was about to leave, when a boy, about his own age, who had heard his questions, said:

"I know how to find him."

"How?" asked Larry, his heart beating high with hope again. "Tell me where he is."

"I can't tell you where he is," the boy answered, "but I know he hangs out in Chinatown. You go down there, and near the end of Pell Street is a Chinese grocery, with a funny image in the window. The image has a red stone in one eye, and none in the other. I know, 'cause I went with Peter once, when he was going to have me join a gang of fellers, only my mother wouldn't let me. They used to meet over that grocery. Maybe he ain't there now, but he used to be. You'll see the image in the window. The gang he belongs to was called the Red Eye Gang."

Thanking the lad for his information Larry hurried away. He felt that at last he was on the trail, and wanted to follow it up at once. He

made his way to Chinatown, and was soon in that section of the city where so much crime abounds.

He had seldom been there, for only the older reporters were sent on stories in that locality. It was not altogether safe in daytime, and at night it must be a bold man who would venture there alone.

At first all the streets seemed made up of groceries and Chinese laundries. Pell Street appeared to be one continuous string of them, and each one seemed to have some sort of an image or idol in the window.

"I guess I'll have my own troubles picking out the place," thought Larry. "They all look alike. However, I'll be on the watch for the one-eyed image."

He had almost reached the end of Pell Street when, in the window of a small store, that seemed to be trying to hide away from sight between two larger ones, he spied a big wooden idol in the window. Before it burned a number of Joss sticks, and, as Larry placed his nose against the pane, he discerned dimly through the smoke that the image had one eye, made of a red stone, but that the socket of the other was empty, giving an odd expression to the grinning face.

"This must be the place," thought Larry, his heart beating rapidly with hope. He looked up at the windows. They were screened with red curtains, and seemed never to have been washed. There was a door leading to a hallway at one side

of the grocery entrance. Larry resolved to try the store first. He found a fat Chinese smoking behind a counter.

"Wha' bloy wan'?" inquired the Celestial. "Glot nice clulumbler, melon sleed, ginger loot, nuts. Wha' bloy want?"

"I didn't come to buy anything," Larry explained, speaking slowly, so the almond-eyed one could understand him. "Do you know anybody named Peter Manton? He's a boy I'm looking for. Do you know Peter Manton?"

The answer of the Chinese was no less prompt than it was startling. He leaped to his feet, dropping his pipe to the floor, and seizing a heavy vase from the counter threw it straight at Larry's head. The boy ducked only just in time, and the ornament was shattered against the wall.

"I show you, Pleter Manton!" exclaimed the Celestial, running from behind the counter, while Larry, who had straightened up, after ducking down, did not know what to make of it at all.

CHAPTER XXXIII

ON THE RIGHT TRACK

"WHAT'S the matter?" asked Larry, thinking he might have stumbled in on a crazy man. "I haven't done anything to you."

He did not move, more, perhaps, because it was so sudden, than from any bravery, and when the Chinese stood in front of him, shaking his fist, Larry maintained his ground.

"Your name Pleter Manton?" asked the Chinese, in a high-pitched voice.

"No, my name's Larry Dexter," replied our hero. "I want to find Peter Manton."

"Yo' sure yo' no Pleter Manton?"

"Of course I'm sure."

"Then me solly," the Celestial went on. "Me t'ink yo' him. Yo' 'scuse me?"

"Of course," replied Larry, seeing that a mistake had been made.

The Chinese quieted down from the rage into which the mention of the name Peter Manton had seemed to throw him. He looked Larry over closely, and then a smile came stealing upon his face.

"No; yo' no Pleter," he remarked. "First me take yo' fo' him."

"What makes you mad at him?" asked Larry, anxiously.

"He blad bloy," the Chinese went on. "He mlake tlouble for Ah Moy. He have looms up stails, an' him an' odder bloys bleak windows, an' make all bad. Me lose money."

"Did Peter use to have a clubroom here?" asked Larry, feeling that at last he was getting on the right track.

The Chinese nodded vigorously in the affirmative.

"Where has he gone now?" asked Larry.

At this question the Chinese, who had seemed to be very frank, regarded Larry suspiciously. He half shut his eyes, which at the best were not very widely open, and asked:

"Wha' flo' yo' want know?"

"I want to see him."

"S'plose he no want see yo'?" suggested Ah Moy.

That was a puzzler for Larry. He was not used to answering such sharp questions as the Chinese put, and he could not understand the Celestial's sudden interest in the welfare of Peter, when, before, the Oriental had appeared to want to punish the lad.

"Well, I want to see him, even if he doesn't want to see me," replied Larry, at length.

"He glot some yo' money?"

Arguing that the deed might be considered money, as it represented a large sum, and feeling

sure that if Peter did not have it, he knew where it was, Larry replied:

"Peter has some of my money."

"If me tell yo' where Pleter is, yo' give me some money?" asked Ah Moy.

"What for?" Larry was trying to gain time to think.

"He make me lose tlee dollar bleakin' my window," the Chinese went on. "He an' odder bloys what are in club. He no pay me. Maybe yo' pay me."

"If you tell me where to find Peter I'll give you the three dollars," Larry answered, thinking it would be a sum spent in a good cause.

"All light," announced Ah Moy, cheerfully. "Give me money."

"Here it is," replied Larry, producing the bills, and holding them where the Chinese could see them. "Now you tell me."

Ah Moy leaned forward, first taking care to look out toward the street, and see that no one was headed for his store. Then he whispered:

"Yo' find door where Lising Sun painted, an' yo' find Pleter, an' maybe somebody else, li'l' feller what cly all time."

"Do you mean my little brother?" exclaimed Larry, in great excitement.

"Give me money!" cried Ah Moy, snatching the bills from Larry's hand. "Me tell yo' where yo' go. Look for Lising Sun, an' you find Pleter Now go. Me no like to have yo' here!"

Then, before Larry could make any objections, if he had thought to do so, the Celestial grabbed the boy by the shoulders, and thrust him, though not very roughly, out of the front door and into the street. Larry heard Ah Moy close and lock the portal behind him, and realized the Chinese had taken an effective method of getting rid of him.

"Well, of all the queer proceedings," remarked Larry. "I seem to be getting deeper and deeper into the mystery."

He turned to look at the one-eyed image, but Ah Moy had pulled down the shades, and the place had every appearance of being deserted.

"The rising sun," murmured Larry. "I wonder what he meant. Seems to me that's what they call China or Japan, I've forgotten which. I hope they haven't taken Jimmy away off there."

His heart grew cold at the thought, but he reassured himself that the gang would hardly go to that length, particularly as they might want to produce the little fellow at short notice.

"Maybe it's some place in Chinatown," reasoned the young reporter. "I must find out, but I'll have to go slow."

From what Ah Moy had told him it seemed that the doings of Chinatown were known to most of the members of the under-world. Consequently, if he began making inquiries, the news would be communicated to the members of the gang. If they heard someone was on their trail

they might depart to another hiding-place, and make it all the harder to locate them.

"I must ask of someone who is not a Chinese," thought Larry. "Maybe the Rising Sun is the name of some sort of a club. That's what I'll do!" he exclaimed, as he suddenly became possessed of an idea. "I'll pretend I'm looking for a club of that name, and I'll ask the first American storekeeper I meet."

Larry walked slowly along the street. The thoroughfare seemed filled with Celestials, with their wide trousers and wider-sleeved blouses, tramping along in their thick-soled shoes, but there seemed to be a great scarcity of Americans. Looking about him for an establishment kept by someone other than an almond-eyed individual, Larry espied a block or so away, the sign of three golden balls suspended in the air.

"There's a pawnbroker's," thought Larry. "He's sure to be something else besides a Chinese. I'll try him."

Much attracted by the curious sights on every side, Larry proceeded down the street. He looked into the pawnbroker's shop before entering, but as the glass door was painted, he could discern nothing.

"Well, here goes," remarked Larry to himself. "We'll see what sort of information I can get."

He opened the door softly, and stepped into the place. In front of the counter stood a man who seemed to be bargaining with the pawn-

broker over the amount to be loaned on an article. They were so occupied with their business that they did not notice the young reporter's entrance.

"You ought to give me more than twenty dollars," the customer was saying.

"Fifteen is all; take it or leave it," was the pawnbroker's answer. "It is a cheap ring."

"But the diamond in the tail is worth more than that," the man went on, "and the rubies in the eyes are worth twice as much. Come on, now, Isaacs, let me have twenty dollars, that's a good fellow. I'm hard up, and the gang is up against bad luck."

Something seemed to tell Larry he was on the track of those whom he sought, but for an instant he could not fathom what it was. There seemed to be a clew in the mention of a diamond in the tail and rubies in the eyes.

"I know!" the young reporter thought, almost exclaiming aloud in his excitement. "It's the ring Mr. Reynolds told me about. The one that was stolen from him, and which he wished to recover because it was an heirloom."

He drew a little closer to where the man was standing, hoping to get a look at the jewel. Nor was he disappointed. The pawnbroker, who had apparently made his last offer, handed something to the customer. The latter's hand shook so he dropped the article on the floor, and it rolled almost to Larry's feet. The lad picked it up. He saw that it was a ring, made in the shape of a

snake, with three coils. In the end of the tail was a diamond, and the eyes were formed of rubies. It was exactly like the ornament Mr. Reynolds had described.

Larry's heart was beating so he was afraid the men would hear it. However, he managed to hand the ring back to the customer, who was too much engrossed in the transaction to notice Larry.

"Well, Isaacs," the man remarked, handing the ring over to the pawnbroker, "I'll take the fifteen dollars, but it's little enough. I'll be getting it out again in a few days. Make out the ticket."

Larry walked back to the door while the broker was concluding the transaction. He wondered what he had better do. Here was a chance to get on the track of the Reynolds jewel robbers, but to accomplish this he would have to give up, for a time, the search after his brother.

"Unless the two gangs should prove to be one and the same," thought Larry, with a sudden inspiration. "I wonder if that couldn't be so. The safe-robbers and the kidnappers are all together; why not the jewel thieves? I think I'll chance it, anyhow. I'll follow this man, and see if I can't find out where he stays. I can find out about the Rising Sun place later."

With this in mind, Larry softly slipped out of the door, and stationed himself in a nearby hallway, to stay until the man came from the pawnshop. He had not long to wait, for in a few min-

utes the man emerged, and the young reporter set off after him.

Larry had never had much experience in "shadowing" people, as the detectives call following a man, and not letting him know he is under surveillance. But the lad had often gone hunting when in the country, and had learned how to track wild animals. Of course, it was different in the city, but some of the principles held true.

Letting the man who had pawned the ring get about half a block ahead, Larry started after him. The fellow did not seem to be on the lookout, but walked on rapidly, paying no attention to persons or objects he passed in the street.

Through several thoroughfares in Chinatown the chase led, until Larry finally found himself in the very worst section of that very bad part of New York. The buildings were old and tumble-down, and in spite of the sunlight overhead, it seemed dark and gloomy.

The man came to a pause in front of a certain house. He looked all about him, and Larry saw his glance in time to dodge into a hallway. Then the man disappeared into the building. Larry glided forward, and was about to follow him, when from the place several Chinese leaped out, yelling shrilly.

At the same time a fusillade of revolver shots rang out, and the yells increased. All at once it seemed that the street was full of Chinese.

CHAPTER XXXIV

CLOSING IN

"CRACK! Crack! Crack!"

Those were the revolvers barking, and spitting fire.

"Hi! Ki! Yi! Yee! Yip!"

That was the frightened Celestials singing out. Those who were not yelling like cats and dogs combined, were firing revolvers. They seemed to have no object in view except to fire, shutting their eyes, and pulling the trigger, while the weapon was aimed in any and all directions.

One of those sudden and inexplicable shooting affairs for which Chinatown is noted, and which are precipitated by secret society hatreds, was on.

From around the corner of the street, as if by magic, appeared another band of Chinese. They began firing at the throng that poured from the building where the man who had pawned the snake ring, had entered. Larry dodged into a doorway, out of reach of any stray bullets.

Little damage seemed to be done by the shooting, as the Celestials fired without any particular aim. Yet one or two were hit by the bullets, and ran about the streets howling with pain.

The riot had been in progress about two minutes before any police arrived. Then a squad of them swung into the thoroughfare, and with drawn clubs sprang into the midst of the mob of Chinese. The stout sticks thumped on many a pigtailed head, and soon the yells of rage were turned into shouts of dismay.

The shooting died away, and the Orientals scampered like rats back to their holes. Two or three who had received bullets in their legs, were lying in the middle of the street. Then came a couple of patrol wagons and an ambulance, into which the wounded were lifted, and quick trips made to hospitals. The police took several prisoners, who were taken to the station-house, and then—the street became quiet again.

Save for a few revolvers which the owners had thrown away, there remained no sign of the riot, and Larry could hardly believe that he had witnessed it. It seemed like a dream.

"I must telephone the paper about it," he thought. "Then I'll keep on after that man."

Noting the address of the house into which the pawner of the ring had vanished, Larry went back to the Bowery, where he found a public telephone, and was soon in communication with Mr. Emberg.

"You stay where you are until I can send one of the reporters down to see you," the city editor said. "You can tell him what happened, and he can write the story. Then you can go on with

your hunt. I hope you'll succeed. Do you need any help?"

"I guess I can get along for a while yet," answered Larry. "I only want to locate a certain place, and then I'll get Mr. Newton to advise me."

He waited in the telephone station until the reporter from the *Leader* arrived. Then, accompanied by him, Larry went back to Chinatown. The other reporter got a lot of information about the riot, and, with what Larry had told him, soon had enough for a good lively story.

"Now here goes to see what's in that house," murmured Larry, when the reporter had left him. "I hope I get on the track of the Rising Sun. I wonder what it means, anyhow."

Not without some little fear did he enter the dark hallway. It was not a pleasant place. There were odd and noisome smells, for the place, like most of those in Chinatown, was more or less of an opium joint. Then there was the odor of the Joss sticks burning in a sort of improvised temple in the rear of the first floor.

Up the stairs Larry went. He hardly knew what he was going to do, nor, if he was questioned by anyone, did he know what he would say. He was trusting to luck. As he passed through the dimly-lighted halls a door would open here and there, and the head of a Chinese would be poked out. But the portal was quickly closed again when the owner of the head saw it was an American youth.

After a riot such as had just transpired, the Chinese had no desire to answer embarrassing questions such as they knew the Americans asked. The Americans were too curious, the Celestials thought. So it was best to stay in one's room, and pretend not to hear or see anything. Thus Larry was not interfered with or molested, as he might have been on another occasion.

Though he had no definite object in view, Larry had an idea he might chance on some evidence as to where the man lived who had pawned the ring, or might discover some trace of the sign of the Rising Sun. He looked about on the walls and doors of the halls. There were many devices painted thereon. Dragons, snakes, strange birds, and grinning heads.

"I guess I'll go back and tell Mr. Newton," thought Larry. "He'll know how to go about this better than I do."

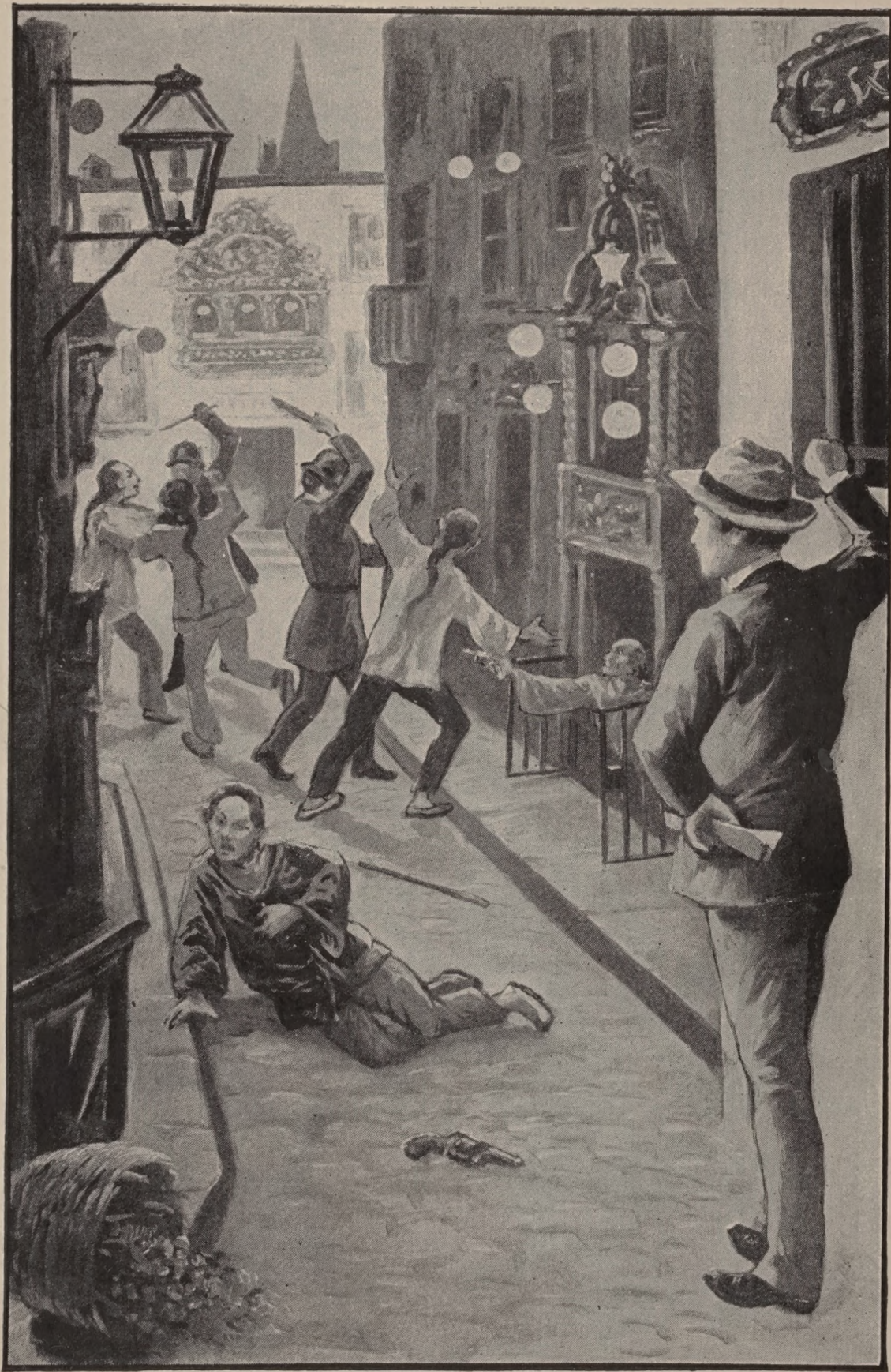
However, there remained the third and top floor hall to inspect, and Larry climbed the stairs to that. He walked from the front to the rear.

"Nothing here, I guess," he murmured.

Then, with a sudden beating of his heart, he caught sight, on the door of a room at the end of the corridor, of a crudely-painted rising sun, with red and yellow rays radiating from it, as it was coming up from behind a mountain.

"This must be the place!" exclaimed the young reporter under his breath.

The next instant he heard from behind the door



THE STOUT STICKS THUMPED ON MANY A PIGTAILED HEAD.

Larry Dexter, Reporter

a cry as of someone in pain or distress, and to Larry the voice sounded like that of his kidnapped brother.

"I wonder—I wonder if Jimmy can be in there!" he gasped.

Once more the stifled cry sounded, and Larry's heart almost stopped beating. He was sure he had found his brother. He sprang forward, and rapped loudly on the door. Instantly there sounded a shuffling of feet from behind the portal. Then all grew still.

"Let me in!" cried Larry.

He paused for a reply. Then he knocked again, and kicked with his feet on the door, but no one answered, and the sturdy oaken portal was not opened. Larry was much excited. He wanted to break down the barrier, and see what was beyond it. He wanted to rush in, and, if his brother was there, to tear him away from the men who had kidnapped him.

"I'd better go for help," Larry said to himself, at length. "I can't do anything alone. Anyhow, I've located the Rising Sun crowd. I'd better not make too much of a fuss, or they'll suspect I'm after them, and move away."

He hurried downstairs, wishing he could find Mr. Newton at once, instead of waiting until night, when the older reporter had promised Larry to call at the Dexter house.

"I suppose he's trailing the end from the sign of the blue hand," thought Larry.

He had half a mind to see if he could not locate the gang's former headquarters, but he feared that the quest might lead him into trouble. Also, he did not want to spoil any plans Mr. Newton had made.

"I guess the only thing I can do is to wait until to-night," mused Larry, "though I hate to go home without good news, no matter how little."

But he knew it was the best thing to do, and he was soon at his house, relating to his mother and Lucy what he had experienced.

"Do you really think he's there?" asked Mrs. Dexter.

"I'm almost certain," replied Larry. "Just you wait, mother. I'm sure we'll have Jimmy before another day goes by."

"I only wish I could believe so," remarked Mrs. Dexter, wiping the tears from her eyes.

In the meanwhile, Mr. Newton had gone to the former headquarters of the gang that had rooms behind the door with the blue hand on it. As he feared, the place was deserted, and no one in the neighborhood knew anything about where the former occupants had gone, or, if they did, they would not tell. In Chinatown it is the policy of the inhabitants to relate just as little as they can.

With all his reporter's experience in tracing matters, with all the skill which long association with the police and detectives had given him, Mr. Newton sought to locate some member of the blue-handed gang to learn where their head-

quarters were now. But all to no avail. Even the advertisement Larry had inserted, agreeing to sign the deed, was not answered.

"I hope Larry is having better luck than I am," mused the reporter. "I'm beat, I'm afraid. Guess I'll drop in here, and get a cigar. Maybe it will help me to think of some plan I haven't tried yet."

There was a tobacco store nearby, and going in, Mr. Newton purchased something to smoke. While the proprietor was getting the change Mr. Newton's attention was attracted to the sound of voices in a rear room.

"If one of them isn't Alderman Beacham and the other Samuel Snyder, that rascally lawyer, I'm very much mistaken," thought Mr. Newton. "I wonder what they're having a confab in here for? Up to some political trick, I suppose, and they're afraid to talk it over at City Hall."

He could not help overhearing some of the things that were said, and as the words came to him he gave a sudden start.

"So that's the game, eh?" he murmured. "No wonder they want that deed. By the Great Horn Spoon! but I think I'm on the right track now!"

By this time the proprietor returned with the change, but Mr. Newton was in no hurry to go. He pretended he wanted to buy a pipe, and, while examining the cigar-dealer's stock, he kept his ears open for anything more that might issue from the rear room. He could only catch a stray

word now and again, but what he heard gave him much satisfaction.

Finally he made a selection of a pipe, and paid for it. Leaving the store he hurried off, a smile displacing the former discouraged look his face had worn.

"I wonder why I never thought of that before!" he exclaimed, softly. "That's what the Aldermanic Committee has been meeting in secret so often for. That's the reason they would never admit that any business was done. My! but this is going to be a big thing! I can see a fine story in it, and maybe a beat. I can see something good for Larry, too, and if it doesn't bring his brother back, and land some people in jail, I'm going to miss my guess," and Mr. Newton felt so elated over the discovery he had accidentally made that he felt like hopping and skipping along the street. Thinking that would hardly be in keeping with the dignity of a reporter, however, he fell to whistling to relieve his spirits, and warbled forth tuneful strains from a comic opera, as being most appropriate.

"Now to see Larry, and tell him the good news," thought Mr. Newton. "We'll have to make careful plans to close in on the gang. The only thing lacking is to know where they are, but with what I know I'll have no trouble finding them. Whoop! I feel like a boy again!"

He went to the Dexter home, where, though he did not expect it, he found Larry. It was late in

the afternoon, and Mr. Newton was tired with his quest.

"Any news?" he asked Larry.

"A little. How about you?"

"Everything we could wish for. Larry, my boy, I think we've got 'em. We'll nab 'em inside of two days."

"And will you get Jimmy back?" asked Mrs. Dexter.

"The first thing!" exclaimed Mr. Newton.

Then he and Larry told each other their experiences, and prepared their plans for closing in on the gang. They could not imagine why there was no answer to the personal they had inserted, but, as it afterward developed, none of the gang had seen it, not counting on it being put in so soon after the kidnapping.

CHAPTER XXXV

NEARING THE END

JIMMY, who had fretted all day, cried so much the second night of his captivity that Peter and Noddy were much alarmed. They tried their best to comfort the lad, but he continued to weep, and demanded to be taken to his mother and Larry.

"Can't you amuse him in some way?" the blue-handed man asked of Peter.

"I've done my best," replied the former copy boy. "He's homesick, that's what's the matter."

"And small blame to him," put in Noddy. "It's a bad business all around, and I'm worried over how we'll come out of it. If the kid keeps on crying there'll be talk in the neighborhood, and that may lead to an investigation. Besides he'll make himself sick, and we'll have to send for a doctor. That would give the game away."

"We can get a Chink doctor," spoke Peter.

"Yes, and have him give the kid some ground-up snails, or pieces of birds' nests," exclaimed Noddy. "No, sir, no Chinese quack is going to monkey with the lad. If we have to have a doctor we'll get a good one, even though it spoils the game. I'm not going to be responsible for the lad's taking a bad turn, and maybe dying."

"Do you think there's any danger?" asked Peter, who was beginning to wish he had never had anything to do with the gang.

"You can never tell what kids are going to do. Wait, I'll try to tell him a story. I used to be quite a hand at it when—when my youngster was alive," and Noddy gulped down a hard lump in his throat. Bad as he was, he still had a tender spot in his heart for his dead child.

"Come on, Jimmy," the blue-handed man said to the captive. "I'm going to tell you about a bear."

"Can't you tell me about a giant?" demanded the lad.

"Well, I guess so," and then Noddy related a tale about a big giant who used to keep his captives in a terrible castle.

"You're a sort of giant, ain't you?" asked Jimmy of Noddy.

"No. What makes you ask that?"

"Because you've got hands like Blue Beard, and you keep me here, and won't let me go home."

"No, I'm not quite as bad as that," said Noddy, "but I'm bad enough, the land knows. I'd let you go home if I could. Maybe we can, to-morrow or next day. I wish Larry would give in to the gang, or else come here and take the kid," the blue-handed man muttered, in a low tone.

It required several stories before Jimmy could be comforted, and made to forget his troubles.

He fell asleep under the influence of a fine big Chinese drum that the blue-handed man promised would be given him the next day.

"Well, I'm glad he's in slumberland," remarked Noddy, as he covered Jimmy up in bed. "I couldn't stand this very long."

That evening several members of the gang came in, and Noddy laid the case before them.

"It's all right for you fellows," he said, "but you don't have to stay here all day and amuse the kid, and keep him from crying for his mother. If I only had to go out and do things the way you do I wouldn't mind it."

"Well, you'll have to stay shut up for a while longer, on account of your hands," remarked Perkins. "It can't be very long now. I wouldn't wonder but there'd be a personal in to-morrow morning's papers, saying Larry and his mother had agreed to sign the deed. That will end the whole matter."

"Well, I only hope it does," growled Noddy. "It's the last trick of this kind you get me into."

"Brace up!" exclaimed Perkins. "You're a little down in the mouth now. When you get your share out of the deal you'll be satisfied. I guess the game is almost up now. There should have been a personal in before this." But fate had so ordered that the one Larry and Mr. Newton inserted was not seen.

"Suppose you don't hear from Larry?" asked Noddy.

"If we don't inside of three days," answered Perkins, "we're going ahead on a brand-new plan."

"What is it?"

"We'll simply condemn the land, and then we'll get it for almost nothing. Only that process is a little slow, and we're in a hurry. Snyder and Beacham had a talk on the matter somewhere to-day, I understand, and decided the thing could be kept secret no longer. The news will be out in a week at the most, so whatever is done must be done quickly."

The men talked over various other matters, and then, as the hour was growing late, they departed, leaving Peter and Noddy in charge of Jimmy.

"Better turn in," advised the blue-handed man to Peter.

"Guess I will," said the former copy boy. "I'm going to get up early, and get a morning paper to see if Larry has put a personal in."

While he was getting ready for bed Noddy went in to look at Jimmy. He found the lad's face wet with tears.

"Poor little chap," remarked Noddy. "I wish I was out of this game."

Then he, too, went to bed, and there was silence in the headquarters of the Rising Sun gang, broken only by the breathing of the sleepers. Outside the hum and confusion of Chinatown went on in the semi-darkness.

Meanwhile Larry and Mr. Newton had been planning away. They had told each other their experiences, and Mr. Newton was glad to learn that Larry had located the headquarters of the gang.

"I can't understand the man from the pawnshop going in there, however," commented the older reporter. "He may be mixed up with the gang, but it hardly seems possible that the jewel robbers, the safe-crackers, and the kidnappers are all members of one organization. However, if it's so, so much the better."

"Why?"

"Because we'll bag them all at once, and kill two or three birds with one stone. Now let's see what we'd better do first."

"Did you ever hear of the Rising Sun gang," asked Larry.

"Many times. They're about as bad as any crowd that infests New York."

"Why not get a lot of police officers, and raid the place?" suggested Larry.

"It would be all right if we could guard every entrance," said Mr. Newton. "But they have half a dozen, and they'd be sure to escape through one or the other."

"How are you going to do it, then?"

"I think we'll resort to a little strategy," said the older reporter. "We'll insert another personal, directed to the blue-handed man, asking where we can go to sign the deed. They evi-

dently missed that first one. It was put in before they expected it."

"But do you really want me to sign the deed?" asked Larry.

"Not for the world. We'll simply ask them where we can meet them to sign it. We're not promising to do what they want. I'll write the advertisement out now, and we can put it in all the morning papers."

"After that, what?"

"We'll wait for an answer, and then we'll be guided by what occurs next."

So the advertisement, carefully worded, was prepared, and Mr. Newton took it to an agent who made a business of inserting notices in all the New York papers.

When this had been done it was evening, and, as there seemed to be little chance of accomplishing anything more that night, Mr. Newton advised Larry to go to bed and get a good night's sleep.

"Perhaps I'd better stay around in the neighborhood of the gang's headquarters," suggested Larry. "They might take Jimmy away during the night."

"Not much danger of that," replied Mr. Newton. "If they wanted to smuggle him away, all the watching you could do would not stop it. The best way is to let them think they're safe, and that we know nothing about them. They probably will do nothing for a few more days."

So the same night that Jimmy, in Noddy's room, cried himself to sleep, Larry went to bed in his own home, his head full of thoughts of the rescue he hoped would soon be accomplished.

The next morning Peter went out early, and got several papers. He and Noddy carefully scanned the personal columns, and among the first items that met their eyes was the advertisement Larry and Mr. Newton had inserted.

"Here it is!" cried Noddy. "He's come to terms at last. I'm glad of it, for I want to see the kid taken home. Now, Peter, you hurry off, and tell as many members of our society as you can find to come here at once, and we'll decide on a plan of action."

Making a hasty breakfast Peter left the Rising Sun room, and soon had delivered Noddy's message to several members of the gang. They were surprised at the news, but agreed to come to headquarters and talk the matter over, also to decide what would be best to do.

While Jimmy was kept in one of the rear rooms, amused over the big Chinese drum which Noddy had borrowed for him from the little Oriental theater nearby, the members of the organization held a consultation.

"I say, let him come here," suggested Perkins. "We can do the thing here better than anywhere else. Let him bring his mother's consent in writing, to his signing the deed, and let her send a note agreeing that she will sign it later

on. Then let Larry come here alone. Send him a note stating that he will be watched from the time he leaves his house until he gets here. If he stops to speak to anyone, or if he brings anyone with him, the fact will be immediately telephoned to us, and the whole thing will be off."

"Meaning what?" asked Noddy.

"Meaning that we'll hide the kid where he'll never be found."

"No, you don't!" exclaimed Noddy.

"That's all right, Noddy," spoke Randall, in soothing tones. "There'll be no doubt but that Larry will agree to the terms. If he doesn't we'll not hurt the kid. I'm just as fond of him as you are. Don't make trouble now."

"Well, I'll agree, as long as nothing bad happens to the little fellow," stipulated the blue-handed man.

So it was arranged, and a note, making all the conditions specified, was sent to Larry.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE RAID

THE note was delivered by mail to Larry the following day. It named Friday, two days hence, as the time, and one o'clock in the afternoon, as the hour.

"Well, that's the best time to have it happen," remarked Mr. Newton, when shown the missive. "But there are some things that are going to make it hard."

"What makes you say the hour is a good one?" asked Larry.

"Because, if we arrange matters right, we can raid 'em in time for the last edition of the *Leader*, and get a beat."

"That's so; I didn't think about that part of it," Larry remarked. "I was only anxious about Jimmy. But what is going to make it hard?"

"Well, I didn't count on them taking so many precautions," answered the older reporter. "I thought you and I could go together, and I figured on being able to have several detectives stationed near by ready to break into the place, as soon as I gave the signal. But now it's got to be done differently."

"If they see you start for their place with any-

one they'll spirit Jimmy away, and probably hide him where we'll never find him. So you'll have to go to the place alone."

"I'm not afraid," observed Larry.

"No, I suppose not, but it upsets my plan. Then again, I wanted to get a sort of preliminary look at the place. From what little I can learn about the Rising Sun gang they have a number of exits at their headquarters. We'll have to guard them all; but how can we, if we don't know where to look for them?"

"That's so," agreed Larry. "It's going to be harder than I thought. Couldn't we get enough police to surround the whole block?"

"We could, but there are two objections to that plan. One is that if we attempt to operate on such a large scale, some hint of our plans will leak out. There are always some leaks in the police department. The other objection is that some of their exits are probably underground, and a man, or several of them, might emerge somewhere in the middle of the next block. No, the only thing to do is to find where all the exits are, and I don't see how I'm going to do it."

"I've got it!" exclaimed Larry. "There's Ah Moy, the Chinese who told me about the rising sun sign on the door."

"Oh, yes; I had forgotten. Well, if we could prevail on him, and he could get us the information, it might do."

"I'm pretty sure he'd help us, if we paid him,"

said Larry. "But I don't know for sure whether he knows all about the place."

"We can soon find out," remarked Mr. Newton. "I'll see him right away, and offer him a good sum."

It was several hours before Mr. Newton returned. Larry was anxiously waiting for him, and when the older reporter entered the room in Larry's house where the planning was going on, Larry burst out with:

"Will Ah Moy do it?"

"He surely will!" said Mr. Newton. "I had to argue with him a good while, though. It seems he is afraid of the gang, as he once belonged to it, but got out of it for some reason or other. But, luckily enough, he knows the layout of the rooms as well as he knows how to read a Chinese laundry ticket, which is no joke. He drew a rough sort of a plan for me, and with that I think I can get ahead of the gang. Now, Larry, I'll tell you what I think we'd better do. When I get through, if you have anything better to propose, don't hesitate to say so."

"In the first place, now that I know where all the exits are, and they are seven in number, I can arrange to have a detective placed at each one. Luckily, they are some distance apart, so stationing men in plain clothes at them will not attract attention. As I surmised, there is one exit on a separate block from the one where the building is."

"At the appointed time you'll start for the gang's headquarters. You'll go all alone, but I'll be close behind you," went on Mr. Newton.

"Won't they see you?"

"I think not. For the first time in my life I'm going to disguise myself a bit. I'll wear a false beard. Well, you'll enter the room, just as their note tells you. What will happen inside, of course, I can't say. You'll have to be governed by circumstances. But don't be afraid, and don't forget that help will be near. When you call out I'll break in the door, and give the signal for the detectives to close in."

"Maybe you'll not be able to hear me shout," Larry suggested. "It's quite a ways to the street."

"I'll be in the hallway," said Mr. Newton. "But, at the same time, perhaps a revolver shot would be a better signal. You can take a pistol with blank cartridges in it. That will do as well as one with bullets, and then no one will be shot by accident, for, though the gang is bad enough, we don't want any serious results, if we can help it."

"Then you'll come to my aid when I fire one shot?" asked Larry.

"That's the idea."

"But how are you going to get into the hallway without being seen? They are going to keep strict watch, I imagine."

"Leave that to me. Now is there anything you

don't understand, or anything you would change?"

"I guess I understand it all," spoke Larry, "and I wouldn't alter a single bit of it. I wish it was time to go now."

"I don't," remarked Mr. Newton, with a laugh. "I've got too much to do to have the raid happen until the appointed time. But when that comes, I'll be ready for it."

The rest of that day and part of the next Mr. Newton found all too short for what he had to do. He made many trips, and saw a number of persons, taking care to see that he was not followed, especially when he went to police headquarters. One visit he made late at night, and that was to a costumer's, where he bought a wig and false beard.

On the morning of Friday, the day planned for the raid, Mr. Newton spent some time at City Hall. He was closeted with the mayor and several of the city officials, and the result of his interviews seemed to be satisfactory.

At last the hour arrived when Larry was to set out from his house for the headquarters of the gang. His mother bade him a tearful good-by, and Lucy, as she kissed him, told him she was sure it would all come out right.

If Larry was watched or followed, he was not able to detect it, though he had no doubt the gang had some one of its members "shadowing" him. He reached Chinatown. The streets, as usual,

were filled with shuffling Orientals, who seemed to have no particular object in view. Larry looked to see if he could catch a sight of Mr. Newton, or any of the detectives, but none was in sight.

He reached the building, and, with a heart that beat wildly in spite of his efforts to remain calm, he started up the stairs. He felt to see if the revolver was safe in the outside pocket of his coat. Mr. Newton had told him to place it there, and to fire it while the weapon was inside the pocket, since to draw it might cause some hasty action on the part of some member of the gang.

Larry gave a timid tap at the door with the rising sun painted on it. The portal instantly swung back, though no one appeared, and a voice called out:

"Come in, Larry."

The young reporter entered. He found himself in a sort of corridor, at the end of which was a room, brightly-lighted, in spite of the fact that it was broad daylight outside.

"Go on into the room," the voice directed, and Larry walked forward.

He found a number of men seated about a table. One wore gloves, and as they were not fastened, Larry had a glimpse of the hands they covered. The skin on them was blue, and Larry knew that at last he had run the blue-handed man to his lair. The others, and there were five of them, glanced sharply at the boy.

"Well, I see you've agreed to our terms," said Perkins, who acted as spokesman.

"Yes," said Larry, his voice trembling a little. "Where is my brother?"

"He's safe," was the reply. "You stick to your part of the agreement, and we will to ours. Where is your mother's note?"

Larry began fumbling in his pocket. At the same time, with wildly-beating heart, he was wondering whether he should give the signal for help. He did not quite know how to proceed.

"Come, the note!" said Perkins, impatiently.

Just at that instant a roughly-dressed man, with a plumber's kit of tools on his shoulder, was entering the hallway downstairs. As he crossed the threshold, another man, with a long scar on his face, lurched forward, and remarked:

"No one allowed in here."

"I'm the plumber, sent to fix a leaky pipe," announced the one with the tools, as he brushed past the man who sought to bar his progress.

Moving quickly but silently, the man with the plumber's tools came to a halt in front of the door with the rising sun on it.

"This is the place. Now to wait until I hear a shot," he said, softly. "I hope the detectives are all in their places."

Larry continued to fumble for the note. He wanted to gain time, and likewise he wanted to see the deed produced, since he knew it must be hidden somewhere in the room.

"I'll sign it now, and my mother can later," spoke Larry.

"That was not the agreement!" said Perkins, sharply. "Are you trying to trick us?"

At that instant there came a cry:

"Larry! Larry! I want Larry!"

"It's Jimmy!" burst out Larry. "Where are you, Jimmy?"

"Get him out of here! He's trying to trick us!" shouted Perkins. Larry made a dash for the room whence his brother's voice had sounded. Perkins jumped up to bar his progress. At the same time all the others in the room rose from their chairs.

Larry thrust his hand into the pocket containing the revolver. Without drawing the weapon he fired.

At the sound of the report Perkins yelled:

"We're trapped! Every man for himself! Scatter! I'll take the kid!"

At that instant, as the sound of the report came to him, the man with the plumber's kit of tools, who had been standing outside the door, drew from the bundle a short but heavy hammer, and with one blow smashed the lock.

As the portal flew open he leaped inside, at the same time blowing shrilly on a whistle he placed to his mouth.

"This is the time Harvey Newton does a bit of real detective work!" he cried, smiling grimly as he dashed toward the lighted room.

CHAPTER XXXVII

WHAT THE OLD DEED BROUGHT

THE place was a scene of confusion. The men were trying to escape, each seeking one of the several secret exits. Perkins dashed toward the room whence the cry of the child had proceeded.

Larry, whose first thought was to rescue Jimmy, watched this man. He saw him emerge from the apartment, with the captive under his arm.

"Drop him!" cried the young reporter, leaping on the back of Perkins.

Anger lent Larry strength. He clasped his arms about the kidnapper, and loosened the man's grip on Jimmy. The little chap was yelling with fear, but as soon as he caught sight of his brother his tears ceased.

"Take me home, Larry!" he exclaimed.

Perkins rolled over and over, the force of his fall caused by Larry's sudden impact sending him spinning. Then, thinking only of his own safety, the man rose to his feet and sped down a secret passageway, while Larry gathered Jimmy close in his arms.

Meanwhile Mr. Newton, who had torn off the

false beard and wig, was grappling with Randall. They were having a fierce struggle, when two detectives who had been stationed outside, and who had dashed in at the sound of Mr. Newton's whistle, sprang on Randall, and soon made him a prisoner.

At this the blue-handed man, seeing that the game was up, made a spring for the mantel. He sought to grasp what looked like an old newspaper, but Mr. Newton, seeing his movement, sent him sprawling with a blow.

"Here with the handcuffs, Jack," the reporter cried to one of the detectives, and soon Noddy was secured.

The others of the gang had scattered, and one of the detectives was about to follow them down a passage that led from the room.

"Don't bother," said Mr. Newton. "They'll be caught before they go very far."

"I guess you've got us right," said Noddy.

"If you only had one guess, you'd win," remarked the reporter, dryly.

"Oh, I'm so glad you came, Larry!" exclaimed Jimmy. "I was so lonesome! I thought you would never get here."

"Better get right home with him, Larry," said Mr. Newton. "Your mother will be worried, I know."

"What about the deed?" asked the young reporter.

"That's so," remarked Mr. Newton. "I sup-

pose we'll have a job hunting for it. They've probably got it hidden away somewhere."

At these words Noddy's face took on a queer look, and he almost smiled.

"Well, we'll find it later," said Mr. Newton. "The chief thing now is to relieve your mother's anxiety. Take Jimmy home."

"I want my kite," said the lad. "Can't go without my kite."

"I'll bring it to you later," said Larry, trying to quiet the little boy.

"No, I want it now," insisted Jimmy. "There 'tis, up on the shelf," and he pointed to where one of the Chinese bird kites was on the mantel. To please him Larry reached for it. The toy seemed to be caught, and, in pulling it down, Larry brought a folded newspaper with it. The paper fell to the floor. Noddy was eying it narrowly.

"Throw the paper away, and bring the kite along," said Larry to Jimmy, who had picked up both articles. The little fellow obeyed. Something in the way in which the newspaper fell to the ground attracted Mr. Newton's attention. He picked it up. As he unfolded it he uttered an exclamation.

"Here's the missing deed!" he cried. "Well, well, this is a lucky find! We might have hunted for a week, and never thought of looking in the folds of an old newspaper. Good for you and your kite, Jimmy! Here, Larry, take this along

home with your brother. Unless I miss my guess, it's going to be worth considerable to you in the future."

As Larry started away with his brother, the deed safely buttoned in an inner pocket, some of the detectives began crowding into the room with their prisoners.

"Did you land 'em all right?" asked Mr. Newton.

"Every one, I guess," replied Sergeant Barnett, who was in charge of the squad. "They came out of the different exits like rats from their holes, and my men nabbed them. We even got that kid, Peter. My, but he was a scared one! It was all Scanlon could do to hold him, he fought so."

"Well, I guess you can take 'em away now," said Mr. Newton. "I've got to get busy and 'phone the story in. Don't say anything to any reporters from the other papers, until I have a chance to get my yarn in, Barnett."

"All right," promised the sergeant.

The patrol-wagon was sent for, and soon the prisoners were on their way to the station-house. In the meanwhile Mr. Newton telephoned in the story of the raid on the Rising Sun gang; every member who had been in the headquarters having been captured. The story was a beat for the *Leader*—one of the biggest of the year.

As for Larry, he lost no time hurrying home with Jimmy and the deed. When he entered the

house, Mrs. Dexter was so excited she almost fainted, and the neighbors, hearing the good news about the return of the kidnapped boy, crowded in to learn the particulars.

Larry told them as well as he could, and then, when the rooms became quiet, and the neighbors had gone to their apartments, he and his mother sat down, and Mrs. Dexter indulged in a good cry. Larry felt a little like it himself, now that the excitement was over, but he decided it was hardly what ought to be done under the circumstances.

As for Jimmy he hardly knew whether to stand on his head or his feet. He danced around, hugged Mary, Lucy, his mother, and Larry, and then told of his experiences, as well as he could, in the Chinese den.

Meanwhile the prisoners were safely lodged in cells, all but Peter. In consideration of his youth, he was sent to the rooms of a society that took charge of wayward boys.

As soon as he had telephoned the story in to his paper, Mr. Newton went to Larry's house. He had discarded his disguise, leaving the plumber's outfit behind, and once more looked like himself.

"Well, it's all over, Larry," he announced, "and I guess we came out with flying colors. I couldn't have done it any better myself, inside that room with the gang. Your signal came just at the right time."

"Oh, I'm so glad it's over, and that Jimmy is safe," remarked Mrs. Dexter.

"Well, it isn't all over yet, by a good bit," said Mr. Newton. "But I trust your worries are. Where's that deed, Larry?"

"Oh, that old deed," exclaimed Mrs. Dexter. "I never want to see it again. It was the cause of all our trouble."

"Yes, and it may be the cause of a good deal of happiness," said Mr. Newton.

"What do you mean?" asked Larry.

"Why, that paper is the title to a valuable piece of real estate. Of course you knew as much as that before, but you didn't know just what. It develops that the Board of Aldermen have decided to make a big park up in the Bronx section. They have been keeping quiet about it so as not to have property values in that vicinity rise before they had a chance to buy what they wanted. But now that they have all they need, excepting the piece you have the deed to, they have announced their plans. You can read about them in the last edition of the *Leader*."

"Then our property is part of what will be the park?" asked Mrs. Dexter.

"That's it, and a valuable part, too. I was told by the aldermanic committee that they were prepared to offer you twenty thousand dollars for the land. If they do, and I think they will, I advise you to take it."

"Of course we will!" shouted Larry. "Think

of twenty thousand dollars! We'll be rich, mother!"

"Well, not exactly rich," remarked Mr. Newton, "but it will help some."

"No wonder the gang wanted to get possession of the land," observed Larry.

"That was their game," went on Mr. Newton. "They learned you had the deed to one of the most valuable pieces. For a long time I could not understand why they wanted it. I suspected some big improvement was going to be made in that section, but I could not learn what. As soon as I overheard the conversation in the cigar-store that day I got on the track. The rest was easy. We only had to follow the different clews, and as it happened they all led to one place."

"Do you think the gang is mixed up in the safe-robbery and the Reynolds jewels job, as well as the land transaction?" asked Larry.

"Of course they are. You see, we practically have proof of the safe-robbery, now that we have the blue-handed man. As for the Reynolds job, the snake ring is enough to fasten that on at least one member.

"They tried to do too much, that was the trouble. Some of the criminals heard of this land scheme from the Aldermen—Beacham especially—and they decided to get that money. If they succeeded in getting control of the land they would have forced the city to pay a very high price for it. When they found fair means

would not accomplish their object they tried foul. But it's all over now, and we won out."

The arrest of the gang, the story in the *Leader*, and the disclosures made concerning the land and other operations, made a big sensation. Larry and Mr. Newton, who had succeeded not only in running the gang to earth, but in getting a story that was a beat, were congratulated on all sides.

The stories ran through the papers for several days. The proof of the robbery of the jewelry store safe was easy, once the blue-handed man was in custody. Eventually those concerned in it were sentenced to prison for long terms. Then it was proved that at least one of the gang, the man who had pawned the snake ring, was concerned in the Reynolds robbery, from which, as told in the first volume, Larry was instrumental in saving the jewels, and this time he got back the heirloom.

Regarding the deed, as Mr. Newton had said, it proved to be of great value. The city made an offer of twenty thousand dollars for the land, and Mrs. Dexter sold it. After all expenses and some back taxes had been paid, she found she had over seventeen thousand dollars, part of which belonged to Larry and the other children.

Peter was sent to a reform school in the hope that he would mend his ways, while the men who had been instrumental in kidnapping Jimmy, and in stealing the deed the night the fire was started

in the tenement, received long sentences in the state prison.

A few days after he had received notification that he and his mother would receive the big sum for the Bronx land, Larry was back at the office.

"Well, Larry," said Mr. Emborg, with a smile, "I suppose now that you're fairly well off, you'll not remain a reporter any longer."

"I will if you'll keep me," replied the youth. "I don't want to go away from the *Leader*, Mr. Emborg. I've only just begun to be a good reporter. I haven't learned half the business yet."

"Well, if you want to stay, I'm sure we want you," said the city editor. "We'd hate to have you go, Larry."

"Then I'm going to stay. I'm going to continue my studies, and maybe some day I'll get a real big assignment," spoke Larry.

And, with this ambition urging him on, we will take leave of Larry for a while. When next we hear of him, provided you care to read any more of his adventures, you may learn what he did in a story called, "Larry Dexter's Special Assignment; or, The Hunt for the Missing Millionaire."

"So you like reporting, eh?" said Mr. Newton.

"I certainly do," answered Larry. "In fact, there is nothing that I like better. The life is full of excitement."

"And occasional perils."

"Well, the dangers can't be helped, Mr. Newton."

"That is true. Well, Larry, I think, if you stick at it, you will make one of the best reporters in New York—and that is saying a good deal."

THE END

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